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# Scrutiny of the Fire Safety at Havebury Housing Partnership

June 2019

## 1. SCOPE

The scope of the fire safety scrutiny was agreed at the panel meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019 as follows:

- a) Does Havebury follow the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005?
- b) Does Havebury's fire safety policy meet its aims and objectives?

## 2. WHAT WE DID

The following methodology was agreed by panel members at the scoping meeting:

What will be reviewed	Details	How
Review of fire safety policy	Examine Havebury's fire safety policy and fire safety regulations to determine Havebury's obligations	Desktop review
H&S Manager to attend meeting	Interview the Health and Safety Manager for clarification of policy, regulation and to ask any additional questions	Invite to PSP meeting
Set questions and collect evidence	Set questions to test fire safety policy and whether Havebury follows fire safety regulations	Desktop review/evidence gathered by Performance Team
Site visits	Spot check Havebury's communal areas to test policy, regulation and make general observations	Site visits
Evidence review	Review evidence gathered by performance team in response to questions raised	Desktop review
Make recommendations	Review evidence and recap site visits to identify recommendations	Desktop review

The timetable of the scrutiny was as follows:

Action	Date
Scrutiny scoping	21 <sup>st</sup> January 2019
Meeting attended by H&S manager	25 <sup>th</sup> February 2019
Questions set and evidence gathered	25 February 2019 / March 2019
Site visits	19 <sup>th</sup> March 2019
Review of evidence and recommendations made	21 <sup>st</sup> May 2019
Final report agreed	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2019

### 3. OUR FINDINGS

- 3.1 To ensure it was manageable, the panel opted to focus the scope of the fire safety scrutiny on Havebury's obligations in respect of fire safety regulation and its fire safety policy. This provided a more concise framework which could be tested.
- 3.2 In addition, panel members had individual concerns they were keen to address within the scrutiny. In particular around personal evacuation plans for disabled tenants, any stay put policy and communication to tenants about specific arrangements in communal blocks of flats in the event of a fire.
- 3.3 Reviewing the fire safety regulations the panel concluded that these referred largely to having an effective process for assessing and mitigating fire risk. They were satisfied that Havebury's fire safety policy, providing it is followed, would ensure Havebury follows the regulations and therefore testing would be carried out on the policy.
- 3.4 Havebury's Health and Safety Manager attended the panel meeting of 25 February 2019. He provided an overview of fire safety in social housing and explained Havebury's fire risk assessment regime, which the panel would later test. The panel asked about changes post Grenfell and the risks/benefits of a stay put policy. The Health and Safety Manager highlighted Havebury was building a relationship with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service to assist in providing assurance.
- 3.5 The panel set 23 questions based on commitments made in Havebury's fire safety policy, the answers to which would be evidenced through analysis of Havebury's data and fire safety records, or by observation on site visits. A full list of the questions is provided at appendix one.
- 3.6 Five sites were selected to visit and spot check from a full list of Havebury's communal areas. The panel were careful to select sites that varied in tenure type, location and age, but otherwise were picked at random as follows:
- York Road, Haverhill
  - Withersfield Road, Haverhill
  - Chestnut Court, Bury St Edmunds (sheltered housing scheme)
  - The Maltings, Bury St Edmunds
  - James School Place, Bury St Edmunds
- 3.7 At all but one site spot checked, the panel found fly-tipping, bins used inappropriately and many overflowing. The panel recognised that Havebury were taking a variety of preventative measures, but that these were not always working. Generally speaking, notices in communal areas regarding fire safety checks were present and up to date. The communal areas of most sites were carpeted. Whilst the panel acknowledged the benefits of having carpets rather than hard flooring, all were stained and looked unattractive.
- 3.8 At York Road the bin stores had push button combination locks, but neither were closed. The stores smelled bad and were untidy with some fly-tipping. Two

prams were stored in communal areas, one under the stairs and another in the shed room, part blocking access to the fuse board. Staff explained that warning notices are placed on such items and posted through letterboxes and that Havebury ultimately remove them. The panel acknowledged however that there is a balance to be struck and such things cannot be policed 100% of the time. There were a significant number of cigarette ends discarded outside the communal entrance and the drying area was in poor condition with a significant build-up of dead leaves.

- 3.9 Withersfield Road is a relatively new scheme. No immediate hazards were identified; however a specific question was raised about the fire door to the communal bin store. The panel observed that the store was well designed and used correctly by residents, but identified that the back of the store, accessed by refuse collectors, opened directly onto a public pavement presenting an increased risk of arson. The fuse board was positioned the bin store side of the fire door and the panel raised that if the door's intumescent seal expanded in the event of a fire, it may impede the fire service's access. At the scheme, the panel discussed fire safety with a resident who offered to show them the sprinkler system within her flat. The panel also opened the fire document box in the communal entrance. Relevant documentation appeared to be present.
- 3.10 The panel visited one sheltered housing scheme, Chestnut Court in Bury St Edmunds. All internal walkways were clear, however within the central courtyard was stored several items, including a gas bottle for a barbeque/patio heater or similar. The noticeboard at the scheme was cluttered, with some fire safety information obscured. The panel observed that there was little signage in corridors pointing to exits and that areas around the exits themselves were dark.
- 3.11 At The Maltings, the panel found some fire safety information on the noticeboard was obscured. There was a substantial fly-tip in the communal bin store, however there was a note left by Havebury asking the resident to remove it or be charged for Havebury to do so. Slight changes in floor level within the corridors were not marked. One lift had no signage identifying it as such, nor any warning about not using it in the event of a fire. There were a significant number of items e.g. doormats, shoes, umbrellas etc. stored in the corridors, outside front doors to flats. Some internal balconies were also being used for storage of bulky items. The panel again however acknowledged the work Havebury do already in trying to prevent storage in communal areas and that it is a constant battle.
- 3.12 At James School Place the panel reviewed the contents of the fire document box and relevant information appeared to be present. Items were stored in corridors here too, including a cycle, wheelchair and clothes horse. Fly-tipping was present in the bin stores and residents were not using the bins correctly. There was a significant number of cigarette ends discarded outside, apparently from a 1<sup>st</sup> floor window under which was planted some ornamental grass, which appeared in dry weather may present a hazard. The panel acknowledged the work Havebury had already done in painting footprints on the bin store floor to encourage tenants to place rubbish inside the bins and the posters put up explaining what bins to use and discourage fly-tipping.

- 3.13 Immediately prior to the site visits, the panel reviewed templates for Havebury staff completing fire risk assessments and later, fire risk assessment report from an external contractor commissioned to complete assessments on new builds and sheltered/supported housing schemes. In both cases the panel were satisfied the checks carried out were sufficiently thorough.
- 3.14 From performance reports and examples provided, the panel were satisfied that all relevant sites had the appropriate fire risk assessments carried out, also that there were no outstanding actions overdue. The panel however identified a significant number of actions not complete arising from assessments carried out by the external contractor.
- 3.15 Whilst not yet overdue, the panel were concerned about the target timescales Havebury applied to the actions, which varied to those recommended by the contractor. Reviewing the actions individually, the panel felt that many should be addressed sooner. The panel were provided with evidence that new build properties were properly signed off against building regulations, but noted no specific reference to fire safety within this process.
- 3.16 In respect of information about individual tenants who may have specific needs or be at increased risk in the event of fire, the panel were informed that this is held only in the fire document box at each site and so queried whether Havebury had ready access to this information centrally, and how it is routinely kept up to date.
- 3.17 The panel noted that information requested in respect of tenants who currently had, or may require alternative means of being alerted to there being a fire e.g. because they are deaf; and whether there are tenants with specific evacuation plans in place or that require them had not been provided.
- 3.18 Reviewing communication to tenants about fire safety, the panel were satisfied that for the most part guidance is clear. They felt however that the information regarding the stay put policy for sheltered/supported schemes was contradictory and confusing.
- 3.19 Havebury's fire safety policy specifies that Havebury should keep a record of all fires, no matter how small. Three fires were recorded on the list provided. The panel requested that Havebury confirm that the list was complete and that no information was missing, also how information about fires is escalated and any potential lessons learned considered.
- 3.20 The panel found that Havebury does not routinely assess and monitor performance of existing systems against new technological developments.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on their findings the panel make the following recommendations:

1. Havebury's 'stay put' guidance for sheltered and supported housing tenants should be clarified and communication to tenants reviewed
2. Havebury should clarify how information about individual tenants who may be at increased risk in the event of a fire, personal evacuation plans for disabled tenants and any block specific guidance is held, managed and updated
3. External storage for push chairs should be considered on new developments and where possible, at existing schemes.
4. Acknowledging there is significant effort already made, Havebury should work with the panel to explore whether there are further options to assist in deterring: storage of tenants' belongings in communal areas, fly-tipping and incorrect use of bin stores
5. All communal noticeboards should be reviewed to ensure they are up to date and that important information is not obscured
6. Management team should review the timescales applied to recommendations made by the external fire risk contractor and reasons for the number of actions arising on new builds post-handover should be explored
7. Havebury should confirm that it's list of fires is exhaustive, complete and how it is reported within the organisation
8. Specific observations made on site visits should be investigated as follows:
  - Marking of changes in floor level at The Maltings
  - Lift signage at The Maltings
  - Planting at James School Place
  - Installation of automatic door closers on bin store doors at York Road, and elsewhere of benefit
  - Provision of facilities for safely disposing of cigarette ends at York Road and anywhere else of benefit, accepting this may not be possible where there is no means for them to be emptied
  - Storage of items in the communal courtyard and signage to, and daytime lighting of, fire exits at Chestnut Court
  - Whether carpet is the most suitable floor covering for communal areas

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we refer back to the questions we aimed to answer at the beginning of the scrutiny:

QUESTION	CONCLUSION
a) Does Havebury follow the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005?	The panel concluded that Havebury's policy, if applied, ensures that Havebury follows the requirements
b) Does Havebury's fire safety policy meet its aims and objectives?	The panel found Havebury to be following its commitments in respect of fire risk assessments. Adherence to some aspects of the policy needs to be clarified, which is reflected in the recommendations made

## Appendix one

Question asked	Evidence provided
Is Havebury consistently carrying out checks on fire/smoke alarms as part of annual service?	Yes, example certificates provided and tenant members of panel confirmed this is the case
Does every property have a stock condition survey, including a HHSRS assessment of fire risk?	89% of habitable assets have been surveyed; target to achieve 100% by end of 2019. Example pro-forma provided included assessment of fire risk
Are all sheltered housing schemes and all general needs communal areas equipped with the appropriate fire safety equipment and signs?	Yes, confirmed through analysis of fire risk assessments and at site visits
Are efforts made to increase resident's awareness of fire safety?	Yes, example communications provided
How is the performance of existing systems monitored and assessed against new technological developments?	The panel found that this does not happen
Are fire escape routes, fire doors, fire alarm call points and firefighting equipment clearly marked?	Yes, confirmed through analysis of fire risk assessments and site visits. Exceptions mentioned in the report and reflected in recommendations
Are all fires, when Havebury is notified, recorded?	Fires have been recorded, however the panel has requested it is confirmed as exhaustive and complete
Have all residents been provided with battery/mains smoke alarms?	Yes, checked at annual gas service
How do Havebury respond to residents who have a disability e.g. hearing impairment, and install appropriate equipment to ensure they are alerted in the event of a fire?	No direct evidence of this was provided which is reflected in the recommendations. Details of tenants with a disability are held in the fire document box at each site
Do all communal areas have smoke alarms fitted? Are they tested?	Yes, checked during fire risk assessments/health and safety checks
Do all Havebury properties receive an annual gas safety check and an additional check before re-letting?	Yes, confirmed from performance reports
Have all portable appliances provided by Havebury had regular checks and been tested in line with PAT testing procedure?	Yes, applicable to sheltered / supported housing schemes - list of items PAT tested provided
Do all Havebury buildings conform to minimum current standard existing at the time of construction, or at the time of any alterations?	Yes, confirmed through example certificates provided
How is the design of building, communal areas, escape routes, building furniture, corridors and staircases considered in respect of fire safety?	Design of new buildings would comply with fire safety element of building regulations
What regular reports do Havebury's board receive on fire safety, particularly on Havebury's compliance with legislation?	Strategic Board receive an annual report. Operations committee receive regular performance reports on fire safety
Are staff aware of and follow service standards applicable to fire safety and how is this checked?	Yes, for those carrying out fire assessments specific training has been provided. General training provided to all staff



Are fire risk assessments carried out in accordance with Havebury policy and fire safety legislation? Are they completed in time and effectively?	Yes, fire risk assessment templates reviewed by panel. Health and safety manager confirmed they are regularly reviewed and updated. Performance reports confirmed all have been completed
Are any actions arising from fire risk assessments carried out in a timely manner?	Performance reports confirmed none overdue. Recommendation made regarding timeliness of actions raised by external contractor
Are any actions arising from FRAs but not practical to complete, recorded and signed off by the person responsible for fire safety?	Yes, list (one action) provided.
Where do Havebury operate a stay put if safe policy? How is this recorded and communicated to residents?	Stay put policy explained by Health and Safety manager. Recommendation made on clarity of communication
How many residents are Havebury aware of with stored oxygen and is the relevant fire authority kept regularly updated. What efforts are made to ensure residents are aware that they must declare to Havebury that they are storing oxygen?	Tenants with stored oxygen have a sign on their door and details held in fire document box. There is no central list
Do Havebury record when express permission has been granted for storage in communal areas?	Not applicable as permission would not be granted
How do Havebury enforce not storing items in communal areas and how is this monitored	Rangers give tenants notice of any items that need to be removed during health and safety check. A number of items were identified during site visits and recommendation made accordingly