

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING – 6TH JANUARY 2021

ITEM OF BUSINESS NO. 7.2 – MEMBERS' QUESTIONS ON THE DISCHARGE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE JOINT AUTHORITIES FOR FIRE & RESCUE AND PENSIONS

The questions set out below, relating to the South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority, were asked at the meeting by Councillor Martin Phipps.

Questions of Councillor Martin Phipps

Residents of North Bank flats were evacuated shortly before Christmas after a fire service inspection which deemed the flats not fit to live in. Why did it take so long for North Bank's fire safety issues to be treated so seriously? Issues to do with North Bank were known for years before.

Are we confident that other flats in Sheffield with similar known fire safety issues, such as cladding, are fit for human habitation?

How can we be sure given the time it took to declare North Bank unfit for humans?

How are flats with known fire safety issues in Sheffield being supported?

Councillor Tony Damms (Fire & Rescue Authority Spokesperson) undertook to arrange for a written response to be provided by the Chief Fire Officer. The response is set out below.

Answer of Councillor Tony Damms **(provided by Alexandra Johnson, Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive)**

Q1. Residents of North Bank flats were evacuated shortly before Christmas after a fire service inspection which deemed the flats not fit to live in. Why did it take so long for North Bank's fire safety issues to be treated so seriously? Issues to do with North Bank were known for years before.

A1. This question should more properly be addressed to the Responsible Person (RP) for the building, whose legal duty it is to evaluate risk and take appropriate action to reduce risk to as low as reasonably practicable.

SYFR has taken enforcement action in respect of this building on a number of occasions where the RP was considered to have failed in this duty. The action taken by SYFR was in accordance with the Government and NFCC guidance applicable at

that time. The Grenfell Tragedy and subsequent enquiries have led to a re-evaluation of what can be considered 'tolerably safe' and so enforcement outcomes may now differ from those taken previously. The decision to prohibit use of a building is rarely, if ever, taken in response to a single defect within the building. More often, the combined effect of numerous defects leads to a decision to issue a prohibition notice. In addition to some known issues, additional concerns were identified during the most recent physical inspection; specifically the smoke ventilation system was found to be in a poor state of repair and there was evidence of poor compartmentation. It was these additional concerns that justified the use of a Prohibition Notice on this occasion.

Q2. Are we confident that other flats in Sheffield with similar known fire safety issues, such as cladding, are fit for human habitation?

A2. The RP's fire risk assessment should consider the nature of fire safety issues, including flammable cladding materials and identify any interim measures or immediate action required. In line with the Government's Building Risk Review Program, SYFR has established a project team and all blocks of flats of 6 or more storeys are in the process of being re-inspected and benchmarked against current guidance. Where defects have been identified and suitable control measures were not already put in place, appropriate enforcement action will be taken and interim measures implemented to mitigate risk in accordance with national guidance issued by Government and the NFCC.

Q3. How can we be sure given the time it took to declare North Bank unfit for humans?

A3. SYFR has a project team working to re-assess the safety of all high-rise residential buildings of six or more storeys throughout the county and take enforcement action as appropriate.

Q4. How are flats with known fire safety issues in Sheffield being supported?

A4. SYFR inspecting officers provide continuing support following any enforcement action, working closely with the local authority housing teams. This ensures that the Responsible Person understands what remedial action is required, has the opportunity to propose, discuss and agree alternative solutions and undertakes the necessary remedial work within an appropriate timescale. Where the RP fails to take the necessary action, SYFR has the power to prosecute those responsible.