

Ledbury Towers meeting 23/8/17 – questions, answers and actions

	Question	Answer	Action
	<p>Heating, hot water and cooking: summary</p> <p>So far we have accessed 34 flats to fit immersion heaters to provide a (limited) hot water supply to residents. In most flats we have had to remove asbestos in the locations needed for the new cylinders, and the asbestos contractors have accessed 51 flats. We have the ability to do 20 a day subject to residents giving access so if this happens could complete in two weeks. This is dependent on residents providing access. We have teams of both asbestos and heating contractors on site ready to do their work. Please make an appointment with your Resident Services Officer so we can complete this work without delay.</p> <p>We have instructed Keepmoat to source and supply the number of electric cookers required, but cannot install these until the electrical supply within and to the blocks has been upgraded. These will be ordered by next Wednesday 30th August and the first batch will arrive for fitting within 7 days and the rest will follow within 1-2 weeks at latest.</p> <p>The blocks electrical supplies and local network do not have the capacity for the additional load of immersion heaters and electric cookers. Keepmoat are currently on site undertaking works to the blocks over the next two weeks, and will be finished by 6th September and we are also working with UKPN in order to upgrade their local supplies to the blocks. We will keep residents informed of any proposed power outages as a result of this work. These will be for a working day each block.</p> <p>Longer term we need to provide you with a proper, permanent heating and hot water service.</p> <p>We plan to install a district heating system to each of the four tower blocks. Initially this will mean that each block will have a temporary large boiler sited somewhere outside the block on the ground floor. Pipework from the boiler will be run internally up the blocks and connected to the existing radiator and hot water circuit within each flat.</p> <p>To do this successfully, and perhaps more importantly, quickly, before the onset of colder weather, we will need access into each flat on approximately four occasions. We know you are keen to have this done as soon as possible and we are aiming to have this work completed by mid October, in time for when we can expect colder weather, so we cannot understate the need for you to please provide the access needed to help us meet this timescale.</p>		
1	Are you saying we can't turn the heating on until mid-October? We are cold.	This is the time we turn on the heating in most of our blocks, but we understand this is difficult for some people who would normally top up heat with electric or other	We note this concern, and will provide a timeline regarding whether electrical heaters can be used by

		heaters. If residents are feeling the cold they should come and speak to us about alternative arrangements.	some in September
2	Will an oil boiler create noise and fumes?	District heating is used on estates across the borough and we are experienced in limiting impact on residents (eg placing it away from homes). Current models are fairly quiet and do not emit fumes.	Council officers to provide images of similar schemes for information.
3	How are we prioritising disabled people and families with children?	We have the details of all vulnerable residents and have been visiting them, but if neighbours are aware of specific needs/concerns please let us know.	Council officers and TRA to carry out visits to vulnerable residents.
4	The hall isn't well-organised. Every time I come in I'm told someone will call me back but no-one does. What are you going to do to improve this?	We are sorry about this. Officers are doing their best but it's clear we need to improve the system.	The council will improve the system of recording information and responding to residents to ensure everyone has a consistent and timely response.
5	Is the immersion heater temporary? It's taking up a lot of space?	The heater is permanent and once the district heating system is in place, water will flow through the existing pipes and the immersion will act as a back up.	
6	What will the costs be with communal heating. Do we have any control?	Modern systems give you individual control for your flat, so you can reduce or increase usage to suit you. Generally fuel costs with district heating are comparable to other methods.	
7	If I've already got an immersion heater, will you replace it?	We'll check it and if it's in good working order we won't replace it.	
8	Can I buy my own cooker instead or choose which one I get?	The cookers need to be under a certain wattage, but we can speak to the contractors about selecting a few for residents to choose from.	The council will ask contractors to select three cookers in different colours and display them in the TRA hall so residents can choose.
9	I live in Peterchurch and my gas has been off for longer than the other flats. I am spending £10 per day on electricity. What will you do to reimburse us?	The problems in Peterchurch began because of an issue with Southern Gas Network, but the gas has stayed off because of the council's decision to turn the gas off. We accept Peterchurch residents may be out of pocket and we will look at how we compensate them.	
Housing moves: summary			

	<p>125 Households have registered on the Homesearch bidding scheme some of these are not yet actively bidding. As a result 94 Households have been placed in band 1, the highest priority for housing. 31 Households need to be verified through the submission of documents/system checks. This is currently being prioritised so we can do the process as quickly as possible and officers are on site contacting residents in order to get the remaining cases registered in band 1. Of these 5 applications that have been submitted within the last 48 hours will be processed today. Of the 188 LBS tenanted properties in the four towers 63 have not placed their name on the bidding scheme. 3 residents have moved. 8 offers have been made and accepted and these households are awaiting move in dates. 10 residents finished in 1st position with their bids and are waiting to view properties. 11 Households finished within 2nd & 3rd positions and are awaiting confirmation of viewing results from 1st applicants. 2 offers were refused by residents following viewing/second thoughts after the bidding cycle. 4 households placed in Bed and breakfast accommodation. This was 6 but 2 have returned.</p> <p>The Housing Solutions service is stationed at the Ledbury office Monday – Sunday 9am-5pm and the office remains open with the extended team 8 am to 8 pm and cover for emergencies 24 hours a day. The officers are able to provide assistance on getting registered, updating medical information, receiving documents and updating errors on applications. They can also provide bidding advice and updates on any offers.</p> <p>All tenants have a right to return to the Towers when the works have completed.</p> <p>We are finalising plans with Hyde Housing Association to purchase a brand new block very close to the Ledbury, with 80 properties from 1 to 3 bedrooms. These will be council properties at council rent. We are hoping these will be ready this November, and we will reserve the whole block for Ledbury Tower residents.</p>		
10	What are you doing for leaseholders? They seem to have been forgotten.	My Southwark Homeowners is there to support leaseholders. Officers have been knocking on leaseholders' doors to talk through their options with them.	The council is sorry that leaseholders are not feeling supported, and will work with the SGTO to set up a meeting to look at their specific issues.
11	Why do we have to bid like anyone else for a new property? We are waiting to move out of homes that aren't safe.	Now the gas has been turned off, the towers are safe, but we understand not everyone feels safe. Band 1 gives you the highest priority and allows you some choice in where you go. We could make direct offers but they often aren't any quicker, and most people want some choice re area and property. But please talk to us if it isn't working for you.	
12	Why are housing officers asking for a letter	We understand that different officers may have asked for	The council will provide residents

	from my employer? It's not easy for me to ask for this.	different paperwork – we will clarify what is required and why, and share a list with officers and residents.	with a list of the paperwork/ID we need to process their housing request, and why we need it.
13	The 80 new properties won't be enough for everyone. How will you prioritise some residents over others?	We believe some residents will choose to move to a different part of the borough, some will want a different size flat, and not everyone will want to move, but if there are more than 80 people who want a flat in the new block our general rule is to prioritise those who have been on the waiting list the longest, and those who work or volunteer.	
14	Will we be putting right the damage to décor from work to fix the gaps/cracks?	The contractors should be tidying when they finish their work, but if you are unhappy with the way things have been left please let us know in the office and we will arrange a visit. Given more invasive works are planned for the blocks, when a full refurbishment will be carried out, we do not recommend that residents go to a lot of effort redecorating now.	
15	What will we do to help overcrowded families?	There is a severe shortage of four bedroom properties in Southwark but we recognise the exceptional circumstances at the Ledbury and will do all we can to help.	
<p>Structural works and issues: summary</p> <p>ARUP say that with gas turned off from the blocks the immediate and main risk will be removed. However, given the concerns raised and the apparent issues with the historical documents we have regarding the history of the blocks we want to make sure everything is up to scratch and so we have asked ARUP to continue to do a comprehensive structural investigation that will include getting into other empty properties across all four blocks to advise on works as we move forward into the major works phase. ARUP are the leading experts in this field and are working with others that have extensive experience of large panel system buildings and understand these kinds of buildings. These further investigations will include testing of materials (the concrete) and an engineering assessment to understand where we may want to add to the strengthening of the tower blocks. We have impressed on ARUP the need to conclude all of this quickly but we want the assessments to be thorough. In other major works projects structural surveys can take 9 months but we have asked them to report on 20th November.</p>			

16	How will the major works affect the fire stopping work that's already been done?	It shouldn't but if there is any breach, we will make it safe. The work will need to be signed off by an independent assessor.	
17	Are Arup looking at all the issues raised in the 1984 documentary 'The Great British Housing Disaster'?	Arup are looking at the broad issues raised in relation to Large Panel System blocks in recent weeks, including what additional strengthening was done at the time of construction, and whether the blocks could withstand a certain force of gas explosion. As there was doubt about this point in their initial investigations, we took the decision to turn off the gas.	We will share Arup's full detailed report with residents when they have finished their investigations.
18	If invasive works are carried out in my flat, won't it be dangerous for my children?	Some residents have said they want to stay in their flats while the work is carried out but until the investigations are finished and we know what major works we need to carry out, we won't know whether this is possible. Obviously we won't carry out works with residents present if there is any safety risk.	
19	Will there be an investigation as to why cracks weren't dealt with historically, picked up by surveys etc?	Yes, Cllr Cryan has asked the Scrutiny Committee to carry out this investigation, to report by the end of the year.	Confirm details when available.
20	Have we created these problems to force people to move out so we can knock the buildings down?	No, absolutely not.	
21	How long will the buildings last – what is its lifespan?	Arup will look at this as part of their investigation. The work they propose will extend the lifespan of the buildings but we can confirm details once we have their report.	
22	Are non-Ledbury residents being allowed to move into the Ledbury Towers as flats become vacant?	No, we need to keep flats empty to carry out our investigations, we have agreed for people to return if they want to, and empty flats help to reduce the overall pressure on the electrical supply.	
23	Did leaseholders pay towards external gas works a few years ago and will we be	No, this was a Southern Gas Network programme and so leaseholders wouldn't have paid towards it.	

	reimbursed?		
24	Will we provide any support to tenants of leaseholders?	In terms of temporary measures, we have offered leaseholder tenants the same support. If these tenants want help to move elsewhere in the private sector we can offer this.	
25	I have concerns about Keepmoat, following poor quality work carried out in my flat before. Are they the right choice?	We are sorry to hear that and will investigate, but ratings for their recent work elsewhere in the borough have been very positive, and Keepmoat will work with resident representatives.	We will look into the resident's specific concerns and raise them with Keepmoat.
<p>Financial assistance: summary</p> <p>£200 has been agreed as compensation per household. Cheques will be hand delivered to all tenants in the four Towers by 1st September. This is consistent with compensation that has been given elsewhere in the borough in emergency situations.</p> <p>We are paying disturbance payments to those who move. So far 2 payments of £5,800 have been processed to pay for two permanent moves. Payments are subject to any outstanding arrears being deducted. We aim to process any allowance as soon as sign-up is completed.</p> <p>If residents speak to officers in the TRA hall, cash can be made available for any emergencies - so far we have paid out £308.99 for things like an oyster card top up to access showers, meals, laundry and replacing the electric kettle of one resident who needed a new kettle because of heating water.</p> <p>The council is compensating residents, as it does in other similar emergency situations, and is paying for Temporary Accommodation for those who need it. Residents have also been offered the opportunity of a longer term move and a disturbance payment. Rent should still be paid.</p>			
26	Will we redecorate people's flats once the major works have been carried out?	Yes, we will carry out a complete refurbishment.	
27	My gas supplier says I have to pay the full amount owed which is several hundred pounds. Can the council help?	Yes, if you bring the details to the TRA hall, we will look at it.	
28	How can we make sure everyone gets the same support? Some people aren't confident asking for help.	Not everyone needs the same level of support, and staff can use their discretion to help people on a case by case basis. However, we agree there needs to be a greater understanding of what is on offer.	Council to publish list of support on offer.

29	When will we get the £200 upfront payment?	We had initially said by 1 st September but will aim to get them out sooner.	NB cheques to be delivered w/c 29/8/17
30	Will compensation go back to when we first reported the issues?	The historic issues will be examined by the Scrutiny investigation and we will decide on next steps once they report back.	
31	Why do we have to pay rent when the council is in breach of our tenancy agreement?	The council has processes in place for these kinds of circumstances where gas is cut off, involving compensation. Rent needs to still be paid for homes provided, but compensation is provided for the inconvenience and any extra costs incurred.	
32	Will your right to buy be protected even if you move?	Yes. If you move out because of the current issues, and return once the major works have been finished, or remain in another council property, you will retain your lifelong tenancy, right to buy etc.	
33	Can the council provide a list of the different terms and conditions offered by the council and housing associations?	Yes, the SGTO has something already prepared.	Cris Claridge to action
34	What happens to the right to return if the blocks have to be knocked down?	We have no plans to demolish the blocks, but we would honour the right to return to council properties on this site.	
35	If a leaseholder bought their property less than 5 years ago do they have to pay the discount back, given the exceptional circumstances?	We can look at this as part of the special leaseholder meeting that is being arranged.	
36	Will Labour, like the Liberal Democrats, include a commitment in their manifesto that the land will remain for council housing?	Yes.	Cllr Peter John to ensure this is included.