

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE – 22 MAY 2002

PROPOSED SCHEME TO CHECK THE CONDITION OF SMOKE DETECTORS

Report by the Director of Homes and Technical Service.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members of the position in respect of smoke detectors, to provide advice on the present maintenance procedure and to make proposals in relation to smoke detectors.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the meeting held on 21 March 2002 members agreed that a further report should be submitted to this Committee in order to enable consideration to be given to the introduction of a scheme to ensure that smoke detectors within the Council houses remained fully operational following installation.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 Currently all Council houses have been fitted with smoke detectors of either battery or hard-wired type and all capital contracts that involve electrical works include the replacement of battery models with hard-wired units.
- 3.2 To date the Council has fitted hard-wired systems within approximately 5,700 homes and some 10,900 homes are currently protected by battery operated detectors. As part of the HRA Capital Works Programme, the Council continue to upgrade to hard-wired units as part of heating and rewiring contracts at the rate of approximately 1,200 units per year with priority being given to care houses and sheltered units. Future projections based on the assumption that current spend levels are maintained, indicate that it will take a further 8years to replace all battery operated units in the Council housing stock.

4. SAFETY AND MAINTENANCE

- 4.1 All hard-wire systems have guarantees of at least 5 years and are expected to have a life span much in excess of this period. The battery systems use carbon zinc batteries with a life span of more than 2 years and all models incorporate test functions and low battery warning systems.
- 4.2 The tenant is responsible for cleaning and testing of hard wired units and the replacement of batteries in battery operated units. The tenant is also responsible for reporting any failure of the unit to the Council.

4.3 The Council will replace any unit reported to be faulty and all units are tested and replaced as necessary in vacant properties prior to re-let.

5. OPTIONS

5.1 It has always been the tenants responsibility for these fittings and test, clean and replace batteries for their own safety. There are a number of tenants however, who ignore the risks involved and choose not to maintain the smoke detector which has been provided. These tenants put themselves and others at risk in the event of a fire.

5.2 Introducing a process of inspecting, testing and maintaining smoke detectors on a yearly basis is possible but at a significant cost to the approved revenue budgets.

5.3 There are three options which the Council might wish to consider. These are:

- The introduction of a scheme whereby the Council carries out regular, annual inspections of smoke detectors including battery replacement.
- The maintenance of the status quo whereby tenants retain responsibility for cleaning and maintaining battery operated smoke detectors, and the Council's continued phased replacement of battery units by hard-wired units under the terms of the Housing Capital Programme.
- An increased level of expenditure within the Housing Capital Programme to ensure replacement of battery operated units within 5 years.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 It is estimated that the costs for annual cleaning, checking all battery operated detectors, replacing all batteries and replacing any faulty detectors encountered, would cost approximately £91,000 based on current agreed rates within the Measured Term Maintenance Contract. No provision for this work has been made within the Housing Repairs budget for 2002/2003.

6.2 This same level of investment if applied, could advance the replacement with hard-wired systems by over 1000 per annum and reduce time to full implementation to 5 years. Again, no provision has been made for this additional expenditure within the Housing Capital Programme budget for 2002/2003.

7. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Nil

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1** Battery operated detectors work perfectly well provided they are maintained in proper working order. The introduction of a new Council service to test and maintain battery operated units, including battery replacement, in Council houses is feasible but does not represent best value for money. There can be no guarantee of full safety cover between inspections since some tenants will still disable units by removing batteries, thereby rendering the smoke detectors useless.

Replacing battery operated units with hard-wire detectors remains the best option for the Council. It is for elected members to determine whether the current rate of replacement is acceptable or whether the programme should be accelerated to achieve an earlier completion date. The additional funding required to do this would need to be found from within the agreed budgets at the expense of other approved projects.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1** It is recommended that Committee

1. Note the position in respect of the current provision smoke detectors and the present maintenance procedures; and
2. Agree the continued phased replacement of battery units by hard-wired units under the terms of the approved Housing Capital Programme for 2002/2003.
3. Consider the need for additional capital funding to accelerate the completion of the replacement programme in future years.

James Lavery
Director of Homes and Technical Services
1 May, 2002
JL/WT

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Homes Capital Programme records
2. Measured Term Maintenance Contract records
3. BRK Electronics and Aico Systems advice sheets

Any person wishing further information should contact Jim Clark, Senior Project Planning Officer, Homes and Technical Services on (01563-576658)

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AGENDA