

Report of Head of Private Sector Housing and Head of Building Control

Report to Director of Communities, Environment & Housing

Date: 7th April 2021

Subject: Approval to administer the Waking Watch Relief Fund in Leeds

Are specific electoral wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s): Beeston and Holbeck, Hunslet and Riverside, Little London and Woodhouse	
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:	
Appendix number:	

Summary

1. Main issues

- Following the Grenfell tragedy a number of high rise blocks have been identified as needing remedial works to improve the fire safety of their residents. Prior to the completion of the remedial works, interim measures have to be in place to ensure that residents remain safe. These can be costly and a burden for leaseholders who are liable for their ongoing cost. A significant cost is the monthly management charges of a waking watch which can cost thousands to have in place.
- The Government post Grenfell has provided building owners with a number of grants to undertake remedial works. These have been provided directly by Government. On the 31st January 2021 the Government announced the Waking Watch Relief Fund (WWRF) totalling £30m to reduce this financial burden on leaseholders by providing a grant to install a fire alarm.
- The WWRF is to be administered by local authorities. Initially Leeds had been initially allocated £693k of the fund to support high rise blocks in the city to remove or reduce the financial burden of the waking watch.
- On 25th March 2012 the Director of Resources and Housing approved the initial spend of the grant allocation of £693k for the city, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and the administration of the process by the Council in line with the criteria for the scheme.

- Following the application process the Council received 9 applications for 11 blocks with costs in excess of the initial £693k. Following further discussions with Government additional funding was agreed to be provided for the works in Leeds. The total funding now available to the Council as grant is £2m.
- The Council has signed sign a Memorandum of Understanding This will allow the Council to spend the fund up to the £2m now allocated, and claim the monies back from Government once all the works have been completed to the building to which it has been granted.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- The investment in the area has contributed to providing homes of the right quality, type and affordability in the right places and minimising homelessness.
- The way of working in the area contributes to keeping people safe from harm and promotes community respect and resilience.

3. Resource Implications

- The scheme will be administered by colleagues in Building Control using existing resources and supported by colleagues in Housing Leeds and West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS).
- There is an additional administration fee of £46k (initially £25k) paid to the Council to support the work required to deliver the fund and scheme.

Recommendations

The Director of Communities, Environment & Housing is requested to approve spend of the grant up to £2m.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to request the Director of Communities, Environment & Housing to approve the spend of up to £2m increased grant allocated to Leeds.

2. Background information

- 2.1 Following the tragedy of Grenfell all high rise blocks across the country have and continue to be investigated to ensure the safety of all residents. Leeds has identified 330 blocks of 18+m in height across the city. The Council and WYFRS have been investigating and continue to investigate these blocks to ensure the safety of all residents. This has identified a number which have issues of fire safety which need addressing, and where remedial works need to be undertaken to ensure resident safety.
- 2.2 Remedial works can take time due to the complexity of the blocks, the cost of works and the process required to actually get works on site and completed. In order to ensure resident safety prior to remedial works being completed, in certain cases interim measures may be required by WYFRS to ensure that residents can continue to reside in these blocks safely. These measure will vary from block to block depending the existing safety measures in place.
- 2.3 In most cases the cost of the interim measures are passed on to leaseholders under the lease agreements which can run into hundreds of extra pounds per month as management charges. This causes financial hardship, effects mental health and wellbeing and blights the lives of those leaseholders effected.
- 2.4 One of the most expensive interim measures is the waking watch. This is an ongoing presence at the blocks, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to detect fires and help with evacuations if necessary. These measures can remain in place for months and years whilst remedial works are undertaken, causing considerable financial and emotional burden on leaseholders.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 The Government has recognised not just the burden of the cost of remedial works, but also the cost of the interim measures on leaseholders. To support the removal of unsafe cladding the Government has already made available £2.6bn in funding to building owners. However this has not reduced the financial burden on leaseholders of the interim measures.
- 3.2 On the 31 January 2020 the Government announced a £30m Waking Watch Relief Fund which aimed to provide grant funding to the owners of blocks with waking watches to install fire alarm systems to negate the cost of such measures. The funding is to ensure that when installed the alarm systems remove or reduce the need for a waking watch, so removing or reducing the ongoing financial burden on the leaseholders.
- 3.3 As part of the £30m funding announced Leeds has been allocated £693k to support measures in the city which had already received approval to spend by the then Director of Resources and Housing.
- 3.4 The Government has provided a prospectus and application form for owners to apply for the funding, but it will be for the Council and WYFRS to determine how best to allocate this on the effected blocks. It will be for the Council to then reclaim

the monies once spent, and confirm it was spent in accordance with the criteria of the funding offer.

- 3.5 The Government has sent out the criteria for those who can apply and what the scheme will cover, as well as the expectation of how it will be allocated and monitored by the Council in order to ensure we can reclaim the monies. Alongside WYFRS, the Council will administer the fund as required in order to ensure that we are able to reclaim all of the money spent.
- 3.6 The date for all application was to be received was the 14th March. As of this date the Council received 9 applications for 11 blocks in the city at a cost of £2m.
- 3.7 Following further discussions with Government they agreed to increase the allocation to Leeds to cover the full ask from all blocks who meet the criteria and deadline for applications. The Council grant allocation has now increased from the initial £693k to up to £2m.
- 3.8 As part of the funding agreement the Council and Government have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding. This sets out the funding agreement between the Council and Government. This has been reviewed by Legal and they are satisfied with the agreement proposed.
- 3.9 The Council will receive a £46k administration fee to support delivery of the fund in Leeds which help with the costs that will be incurred.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation has occurred with the Lead Member, Ward Members, Leeds Cladding Group and West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue
- 4.1.2 The Lead Member and the Chair of Scrutiny have been consulted on wavering the need for call in and both have approved this request.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Screening Form has been completed for the administration of the fund by the Council.

4.3 Council policies and best council plan

- 4.3.1 The scheme will contribute to the compassionate city agenda, improving housing and helping to improve communities.

Climate Emergency

- 4.3.2 The initiatives above have and will help with issues affecting the climate:
 - Better quality homes and standards will help to reduce energy consumption.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 Funding is being provided by Government in the form of a grant which will be claimed back once the works have been completed by the relevant owners.

4.4.2 Officers from West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Building Control and Housing Leeds will administer the scheme and ensure it meets the Government's criteria.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 The report is a Significant Operational Decision, as a direct consequence of a previous Key Decision, and is not eligible for call in.

4.5.2 The Council have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 The risks will be managed by officers from Building Control and Housing Leeds to ensure that all monies spent, meet the criteria of the fund requirements.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Since the Grenfell tragedy there has been ongoing work by the Council and WYFRS to ensure the safety of all residents in high rise blocks. This has resulted in a number of blocks being identified as requiring remedial measures to make them safe to occupy. Whilst these are completed, interim measures may be required to ensure safety of blocks.

5.2 The introduction of interim measure can cause considerable hardship for leaseholders who may, through the management agreements, be liable for these costs. The ongoing cost of a waking watch to leaseholders is considerable. The Government has recognised this and made available the WWRF to supply the installation of fire alarm systems to remove or reduce the cost of waking watches on leaseholders. They have also provided the prospectus and criteria for applications to be made.

5.3 Leeds were initially allocated £693k from the £30m fund. However due to the number of applications the cost is actually £2m. The Government have agreed to increase the grant allocated to the city to meet the full cost of all works. This means the Council has a grant allocation of up to £2m to allocate to the 11 blocks who have been successful with their applications.

5.4 The Council will be administering the fund and ensuring that all monies sent are within the criteria set out by Government in order to ensure that all monies can be reclaimed via the Memorandum of Understanding.

5.5 The fund provides a means to support leaseholders to reduce the financial burden on them which can only be welcomed given the ongoing concerns, hardship and effect on people's wellbeing the cost of a waking watches has on leaseholders.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Director of Communities, Environment & Housing is requested to approve spend of the grant up to £2m.

7. Background documents¹

None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.