

Resident Scrutiny Panel

Spot Check Review 8

Management of Fire Risk at BVT

September 2017

**(NB. Please note additional work has been undertaken by BVT
since this report)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Premise for choosing this topic for a spot check review

Although Panel members usually undertake an in-depth review over a number of months, they are keen to be flexible allowing them to respond to unanticipated events in a timely manner.

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Panel felt it would be appropriate to carry out a spot check of BVT's own fire risk management procedures.

1.2 What did the Panel ask from BVT?

Members were keen to ask for some assurance from BVT about:

- a. BVT's immediate response as a landlord to its tenants after this tragedy
- b. The current fire safety measures that are in place
- c. Whether or not any review of this has taken place since the Grenfell fire

1.3 What assurances was BVT able to provide?

At a meeting of Scrutiny Panel on 14th August 2017, three documents were shared and discussed:

- a. A fire safety briefing note from John McHugh, written specifically in response to the Scrutiny Panel's request for assurance
- b. A copy of a letter from Annette Homer, Director of Housing and Community Services, which went out to all tenants living in a block of flats a few weeks after the Grenfell tragedy
- c. A guidance note about fire safety management of communal areas in blocks of flats and supported housing schemes that all tenants receive, and which was sent out again after the Grenfell fire

2. FINDINGS

2.1 Senior managers had responded, and acted quickly and appropriately to reassure tenants about the fire safety measures in place in the wake of the Grenfell disaster.

2.2 BVT was able to assure the Panel that no external cladding is used and there are no high-rise buildings amongst BVT's existing stock.

2.3 The Panel had asked if there were regular reminders and fire safety checks, not just a response to a disaster. John McHugh's briefing note addresses this: fire risk reviews are undertaken annually; housing officers make regular checks of buildings; a full risk assessment is completed every three years or following significant changes (see **APPENDIX A**).

2.4 The Panel had asked if BVT's fire risk assessment process itself is reviewed on a regular basis. These processes are a matter of legislation which is supplemented by BVT's additional procedures as described in John McHugh's briefing.

2.5 In light of Grenfell Tower and the issue that authorities were unclear of who lived in the block and therefore the numbers of casualties, Panel members were pleased that, in light of previous Scrutiny Review recommendations, BVT is already in the process of improving its collection of tenant data information with the 'Getting to Know You Campaign'.

2.6 **In considering the response and attachments regarding their request for assurance about fire safety, further queries were raised by Scrutiny Panel that BVT management is asked to consider:**

Answers in red are a management response from Annette Homer, Director of Housing and Community Services

a. Does BVT carry out fire drills in the communal blocks?

No, advised by the fire service not to do so.

b. What is the situation in Telford? Do they have similar fire safety procedures?

Yes, same at Telford although Extra Care Scheme has extensive policies and procedures owing to the nature of the building and client profile.

c. Does BVT keep a register of any fire incidents in its properties?

No, we don't keep a register of incidents; however, we may be able to do so on our H&S Software. Our new corporate H&S manager will lead on developing this software to meet our needs.

d. In light of what caused the Grenfell fire (a faulty fridge freezer), does BVT give any guidance about 'keeping safe in your home' or some basic guidelines of what safety features to look for when buying electrical goods? It was suggested that regular Top Tips on fire and home safety issues could be included in the Inview magazine. This would be of equal benefit to both tenants and homeowners. Readers could be referred to the website for more information.

Claire Morrall, PR & Communications Manager, is in the process of creating a new 'Fire Safety' section on the BVT website. This section will link to advice from West Midlands Fire Service on a range of issues covering how residents can protect themselves from fire risk. This work is expected to be complete within the next month.

e. The Panel suggests it would help to have clarity about who holds responsibility for the management of fire risk within the Organisation, as the information supplied to Scrutiny Panel has come from a number of different staff?

The Board ultimately is responsible for fire safety. With the restructure of our maintenance service and our new Corporate H&S Manager, management of the process will be more clearly defined and responsibility for all fire risk assessments will sit with maintenance services.

An Internal Audit report on Compliance is going to the Audit & Risk Committee on 16th November. The Scrutiny Panel report will be attached for additional assurance. The Audit & Risk Committee will then give assurance to Trustees that the system is managed effectively in line with recommendations for improvement.

For information, we have a further meeting with one of our Trustees, John Nolan, on 20th November. John will share his learning and experience of being involved in the post-Grenfell investigation and we will take on board any recommendations from that meeting.

3. CONCLUSION

Scrutiny Panel members were reassured by the responses from BVT, and were particularly pleased that all tenants received information assuring them of fire safety immediately after the Grenfell fire.