

Motion to Council - Sprinklers

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	3 November 2022
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Richard Somner
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	1 October 2022
Report Author:	Bryan Lyttle/Richard Turner
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4235

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 At Council on the 8th July 2021 the following motion was submitted;

Sprinklers:

That this Council:

- Acknowledges that sprinklers and other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) save lives, protect property, reduce the impact of fire on the environment, reduce interruption to business and improve safety for individuals in the community in general and firefighters. In recognising these benefits supports the National Fire Chief's Council position on sprinklers by writing to Central Government to express support for the creation of a legal requirement to fit sprinklers or AFSS in buildings.
- Commits to installation of sprinklers or other AFSS within its own building stock when planning for and constructing new buildings or as a retrofitted solution when undertaking major refurbishments of existing buildings.
- Through building regulations, promotes and supports the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS for all new or refurbished buildings and particularly those that present the most significant risk to the public and firefighters.

1.2 The Chairman requested that the item be debated at the Planning Advisory Group prior to the report being considered by Executive.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree the proposed letter be sent to the Minister (attached).
- 2.2 Members are asked to agree the introduction of AFSS to its own new building stock and existing buildings as part of a major refurbishment on a risk based approach.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:** The provision of an AFSS is a minimum of £2,000 additional cost for a residential development. Commercial developments require a more bespoke system and

therefore no cost can be given at this stage. Further costs will be incurred if the AFSS cannot be connected to the mains water supply.

As an example, fire suppression water mist systems have been installed in both the new Theale Primary School and Highwood Copse School, with a cost in the region of £100k per site.

3.2 **Policy:** As stated in the report.

3.3 **Personnel:** None

3.4 **Legal:** None

3.5 **Risk Management:** None

3.6 **Property:** Contained within the report.

3.7 **Other:** N/A

4. Other options considered

4.1 Not to support the motion.

Executive Summary

5. Introduction / Background

5.1 The motion to Council:

- Acknowledges that sprinklers and other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) save lives, protect property, reduce the impact of fire on the environment, reduce interruption to business and improve safety for individuals in the community in general and firefighters. In recognising these benefits supports the National Fire Chief's Council position on sprinklers by writing to Central Government to express support for the creation of a legal requirement to fit sprinklers or AFSS in buildings.
- Commits to installation of sprinklers or other AFSS within its own building stock when planning for and constructing new buildings or as a retrofitted solution when undertaking major refurbishments of existing buildings.
- Through building regulations, promotes and supports the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS for all new or refurbished buildings and particularly those that present the most significant risk to the public and firefighters.

6. Proposals

6.1 The motion requests that the Council writes to the Minister in support of the National Fire Chiefs Council Position and that building regulations are changed accordingly. It also calls on the Council to install sprinklers in its own buildings.

- 6.2 The inclusion of sprinklers in domestic and commercial property has already been enacted by the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Planning Advisory Group, debated the issue and noted the cost and if the Minister did act upon the letter and AFSS became a legal requirement then it would become part of West Berkshire Council's Building Control policy. The Property Department thought that a viability assessment should be carried out on the council estate once guidance was received and that if sprinklers are an alternative solution then they should be included rather than an automatic across the board retrofit.
- 7.2 Councillors discussed the issue with comments made around that it had been debated previously and that it was best to go with a risk based approach with regards to both new build and when undertaking refurbishment of the council estate. It was also mentioned that because the Council didn't own housing stock or tower blocks it wasn't a real issue of safety as public and office buildings have evacuation policies. It was suggested that instead the Council should focus on residential establishments that care for the vulnerable and strengthen the existing policy and take into consideration disabled children in schools as well. Both Bracknell Forest and Royal Borough have taken on board this risk based approach that considers the firefighters most at risk.
- 7.3 It was noted that a formal Automatic Fire Suppression System Policy (AFSS) already exists within the council (section 8). This AFSS policy applies to new build and major refurbishment capital projects. The policy lays out the circumstances where the policy applies, the method of risk assessment including the risk outcome that would require the installation of a fire suppression system.
- 7.4 The AFSS policy has resulted in the installation of a suppression system in both the new Theale Primary School and new Highwood Copse Primary School.
- 7.5 Planning Advisory Group agreed that a report with a recommendation would be written stating that West Berkshire Council would use a risk based approach in considering installing sprinkler systems into its buildings.

8. Supporting Information

- 8.1 Following a scrutiny review into the installation of automatic fire suppression systems in Council Buildings by the Safer Select Committee, an Individual Decision (ID-2739) by Cllr. Alan Law was approved on 27th March 2014, adopting the Automatic Fire Suppression Systems Policy.
- 8.2 The Automatic Fire Suppression Systems Policy (AFSS) applies to:
- (1) Buildings in the freehold ownership of West Berkshire Council or where sufficiently long leasehold exists to create a strong degree of ownership;
 - (2) New buildings, extensions or major refurbishments where legislation requires the installation of an automatic fire suppression system;

- (3) New buildings, extensions or major refurbishments which meet the definition of The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 section 55: 'Meaning of Development' and are *permanent* in nature;
- (4) Applies to projects with a gross project value greater than £350,000 and the estimated cost of the AFSS is less than 15% of the approved construction budget;

8.3 The AFSS Policy follows a risk assessed approach in three stages:

- (1) Assessment of the criteria to establish if the refurbishment or new build project will require to apply the AFSS policy;
- (2) An AFSS Risk Assessment is to be carried out by a competent Fire Risk Assessor. Such assessment is to establish if the proposed construction represents a High, Average or Low risk.

Inclusion of a sprinkler/AFSS will apply where and outcome is High risk or Average risk.

In the case of schools, assessment is to use the risk analysis tool contained within the Department for Education: Building Bulletin BB100 – Design for Fire Safety in Schools.

- (3) In cases where risk assessment has recommended the inclusion of a sprinkler/afss, the project team may carry out a cost benefit analysis (CBA), only in circumstances where the cost of the afss is greater than 3% of the total construction cost.

Should the project be eligible and the project team choose to carry out a CBA, this is to establish if the afss represents value for money.

It may also be the case that introduction of other design elements into the project may represent either a reduction in risk score or a more beneficial method of reducing fire risk.

8.4 The installation of an afss represents a significant capital investment in a new build or major refurbishment project.

The above criteria assists in ensuring the requirement for an afss is not disproportionate in terms of the overall project budget.

In addition to the capital cost, the budget manager for the site will be required to ensure that there is ongoing revenue funding to maintain the system.

8.5 The application of the AFSS Policy is the responsibility of the Project Officer and the Design Team Members for each individual project.

The project team will, in applying the AFSS Policy appoint specialist assessors as well as the WBC Insurance Officer.

8.6 Each capital project within WBC's capital programme under the Project Management Methodology, will have project governance through a Project Board.

The Project Board receives both updates on progress but also requires to approve the progression of the project through the design stages of the project (in accordance with the Royal Institute of British Architects – RIBA plan of Works 2020). This will include reports and information on all elements of the design, including the afss.

9. Appendices

Proposed letter to the Minister