



ENHANCED MULTI STOREY LIVING

A STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING THE
EXPERIENCE OF LIVING IN A MULTI
STOREY FLAT IN WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE

ABSTRACT

Our multi storey blocks are now over 50 years old and we want to prepare these homes for the future to ensure they offer an attractive place to live where communities can flourish.

Housing Development
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Contents

Introduction:	2
Executive Summary	3
About our multi storey blocks of flats	1
Background to the strategy	1
Consultation	2
Fire safety.....	3
Day to day fire safety	3
Fire Risk Assessments:	3
Asset investment.....	4
Surveys	4
Energy efficiency improvements	4
Lifts	5
Breakdown policy	5
Long term strategy	6
Kitchens and bathrooms	6
Noise insulation pilot.....	6
WIFI	6
Outcome:	6
Common spaces (lobbies, landings and cleaning)	7
Refurbish common spaces	7
Deep cleaning of closes, landings and foyers	7
Enhanced CCTV and emergency lighting	7
Outcome:	7
Surrounding green space and amenities	8
Waste Strategy.....	8
Management	9

Introduction:

I am delighted to introduce the enhanced multi storey living strategy which sets out the actions we are going to take to enhance the experience of those living in our multi storey blocks and support the communities in these blocks to flourish.

The action plan, developed as a result of consultation, represents the overarching themes and tackles common requests from residents and includes improving heating and hot water, deep cleaning and reimagining the common areas, amongst a number of other enhancements.

The strategy and action plan will build upon previous investment in these blocks, including installing external wall insulation which improved the energy efficiency of the blocks and will help ensure that these homes are remain attractive places to live.

We know that high quality housing is a vital component of thriving communities and West Dunbartonshire Council has committed to investing in our homes to ensure that we can offer homes which are safe, energy efficient and desirable. Furthermore, we know investing in our homes in turn delivers a multitude of benefits and improvements, not only for the tenants and residents but to our wider communities and this strategy and corresponding action plan offers an opportunity to do just that.



Cllr Gurpreet Singh Johal
Housing and Communities
Committee Convenor

Executive Summary

Consultation

We surveyed residents using survey monkey for 12 weeks between October and December 2022. We received a good response from all blocks and the residents have provided us with a clear steer in terms of what they would like to see improved in their home and block.

A challenge which emerged from the consultation findings is that many of the improvements people would like do not represent an enhanced living standard but are planned investment through the Housing Capital Investment Programme. For example, similarly to the recent rent consultation exercises kitchens and bathroom renewals and heating upgrades figured high in terms of priorities within the responses.

We also surveyed those on the Council housing waiting list and 40% of those who responded indicated that they would like to live in a multi storey flat and provided improvement suggestions, many of which aligned with what tenants would like to see such as improved estate management of the blocks.

Fire Safety

Fire safety is non-negotiable and has not been subject of community consultation. We currently have a tender out to procure refreshed fire risk assessments and expect to action some enhanced safety measures as a result of the findings. This scale of FRA needs to be completed by

external consultants but the internal H&S team have been, and will continue to be, involved in ensuring our homes are compliant with the required standards.

This strategic fire safety investment will be supported by day to day fire safety delivered by the Caretaking and Building Services team which ensure that there are no obstacles on the common areas and all fire doors operate as they should for example.

Asset Investment

Our multi storey blocks are now over 50 years old and require ongoing investment to ensure that they remain fit for the future. There is a need to balance in-property investment, which will continue, such as kitchens and bathrooms with whole block investment such as energy efficiency, heating, roofs, windows and lifts.

We will as part of the next steps of this strategy, and in response to survey findings:

Scope and procure building fabric surveys for all blocks.

Residents highlighted issues with dampness, mould and poor ventilation. We need to understand the cause. These surveys will also provide a foundation for future investment for example in energy efficiency measures by assessing the performance of the external wall insulation and windows.

Install damp and mould sensors in tenanted properties as a priority

Damp and mould and sensors will help tenants maintain a healthy home whilst providing us with information about which homes are experiencing problems so we can take action to help.

This will support the building fabric surveys by highlighting where problems are and helping us to target repairs.

We will carry out a heating and hot water options appraisal for all blocks

Residents, particularly with electric storage heaters, expressed dissatisfaction with their heating systems and it is important that we review the heating and hot water to ensure that it complies with our fuel poverty and climate change ambitions.

Install Connected Response smart switches in tenanted properties to improve tenant experience of electric storage heaters.

Residents with electric storage heating told us the heating and hot water was expensive and was not available when needed e.g. evenings due to overnight charging periods.

These smart switches will give tenants more control over their heating and hot water and allow them to access better off peak tariffs.

Review asset investment in kitchens, bathrooms and windows

Residents expressed a wish for upgraded kitchens and bathrooms,

including the installation of showers instead of baths. We will investigate our asset investment in the flats to ensure it is meeting cyclical requirements.

Pilot noise insulation in homes (initially void properties)

Whilst some noise is to be expected we will pilot noise insulation options either in void properties in partnership with residents.

Future proofing for our homes

In addition to making homes more energy efficient we need to prepare our homes for the future in terms of technology such a smart home technology. Some residents highlighted in the survey that they struggle to certain internet based tech such as smart meters and Sky services.

Improve Wi-Fi choice in the blocks

We are not responsible for utilities such as WIFI but we will investigate means to improve tenant choice and WIFI connection speed and on opportunities to become more involved.

Common spaces (foyers, landings and CCTV)

The common areas of a block of flats represent first impressions but also receive a lot of traffic from residents and their friends, family, delivery and trades people. It is clear from the survey findings that residents would like to see these spaces improved.

Scope and procure a deep clean contract for all the blocks on a 2 year pilot basis initially

One of the clearest asks from residents were that closes and common areas were cleaner. The caretakers on site do clean the buildings daily but they have a number of other responsibilities and it is apparent that residents would like this to be enhanced.

We will arrange for blocks to be deep cleaned multiple times per year, and review to ensure that it is meeting resident expectations.

Investigate options to refurbish foyers and closes

Foyers and closes are high traffic areas which also provide the vital first impression of a home and residents identified refurbishment as a priority alongside improvements to stores and laundry. It was also noted by residents that signage could be clearer and improved e.g. block names, flat and floor numbers.

Scope works contract for CCTV and emergency lighting

In addition to refurbishing common areas, residents expressed ambitions for improved CCTV coverage and lighting in their blocks to make them feel safer and discourage ASB.

We will also review the intercom systems, which are an important means of controlling who is coming and going in the building.

Green space and amenity offer

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how important local green spaces and amenities such as shops are to our communities. Generally, our residents were happy with the level of amenity offered by our blocks with many commenting on the ease of access to shops and green spaces were attributes they liked about their home.

Develop, in conjunction with residents, plans to improve the immediate greenspace/ parking around their blocks.

Residents expressed ambition to improve their immediate greenspace or parking but each block has specific needs so this will need to be developed in conjunction with residents.

Waste & opportunities for recycling

As the council works to deliver its Climate Change Strategy and achieve national targets around reducing waste sent to landfill, helping all residents but particularly those living in flats to reduce their waste and recycle as much as they can is vitally important. Currently all the multi storey blocks of flats are serviced by a central bin chute. This does not separate waste and is instead taken to landfill.

Instigate a working group to improve waste management and investigate new solutions

The bin chutes in the flats whilst convenient were identified in the

survey as being smelly, noisy and susceptible to blocking. We will form a working group to review waste management for the multi storey blocks.

Supply more recycling bins to the multi storey blocks

Residents at a number of blocks expressed a desire for more recycling facilities. We will work with the waste team to supply additional recycling bins for residents. This may require investment in bin stores or similar to ensure they are housed safely.

Management

Multi storey flats offer a comparatively dense form of housing and whilst this often brings benefits such as sustaining demand for local shops and bus services, it does mean that everyone is living in quite close proximity of one another which can

bring complaints for example noise or smells.

Review housing management policies in relation to resident identified areas of concern such as laundry etiquette, ASB, dogs.

The behaviours of other residents were identified as a major source of dissatisfaction amongst residents. Whilst we cannot control individuals, we can work to encourage respectful behaviour through management and policy.

We will review our policies and utilise communication methods to remind residents of our policies such as how to report ASB and the lift protocol. Some reviews may require some investment such as controlled access to laundry rooms or the introduction of additional staff present at all times.

About our multi storey blocks of flats

- West Dunbartonshire Council have 19 multi storey blocks of flats and contained within these blocks are 1,232 homes.
- The blocks contain one, two and three bedroom flats, some blocks contain a mix but some contain only two bedroom homes.
- All bar one of the blocks are mixed tenure meaning that WDC own some, often the majority, but owner occupiers and private landlords own the remaining share.
- The blocks were built in the 1960s using concrete panels and were insulated and received new double glazing between 2010 & 2015 to make the homes more energy efficient.
- Apart from the three blocks at Littleholm (which are connected to the gas network) and Mountblow House (which has a communal system) the remaining blocks use electric storage heaters as their main form of heating.

Background to the strategy

In 2021 we carried out consultation for our current Local Housing Strategy (2022-2027). We surveyed residents of West Dunbartonshire and received feedback unprompted about the multi-storey flats.

Some people feedback that they thought should be used to house elderly people some people thought they shouldn't, some people thought children shouldn't live in them meanwhile others thought they should, and some people thought they needed investment. West Dunbartonshire Council, acknowledge this feedback and have committed to reviewing our multi-storey stock and looking to enhance what these properties offer our current and future residents.

Using our asset management database we reviewed these properties against a number of criteria including number of voids, number of refusals and cost of repairs. This approach highlights that from an asset management perspective these homes are performing satisfactory but could perform better. Therefore, we also need to ensure that they represent value for money for our HRA long term.

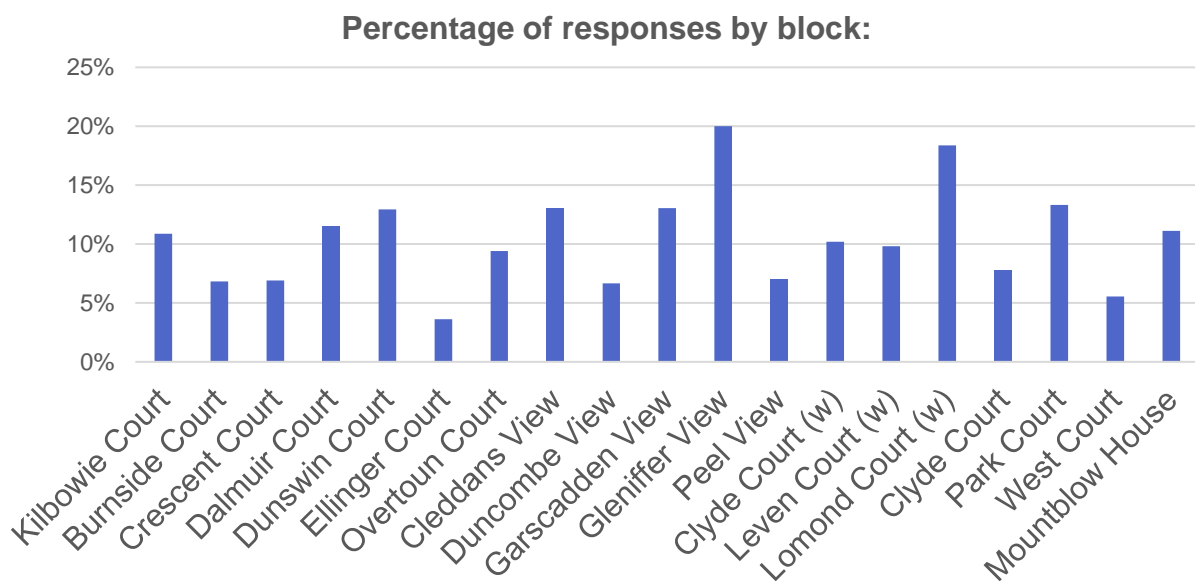
We also note that in the period since Grenfell (2017) multi-storey blocks have been subject to increased scrutiny and concern and it is vital that these homes are as fire safe as any other home and are known to be so.

Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that these homes are popular to live in and people who live there feel safe and wish to stay there a long time and become part of the community.

Consultation

We surveyed residents using survey monkey for 12 weeks between October and December 2022. We received a good response from all blocks, as demonstrated by the chart below, which shows the number of responses as a percent of the total flats in each block. The residents have provided us with a clear steer in terms of what they would like to see improved in their home and block and their constructive feedback is greatly appreciated.

Chart 1: Chart showing the percentage of response by block



Source: Enhanced multis living survey 2022

A full summary report of the survey findings are available as an appendix to this strategy and it highlights that there were a number of positive elements for residents living in the blocks including the neighbours, the size of flats, their layout and storage and unsurprisingly for many – the view.

Residents also put forward a number of suggestions for how to enhance their homes and these have formed the basis for this strategy and action plan. However, it should be noted that a challenge which has emerged from the consultation findings is that many of the enhancements people do not represent an enhanced living standard but are planned investment through the Housing Capital Investment Programme.

We also surveyed those on the waiting list and whilst some people expressed a dislike of the multis, 40% said they would like to live there and provided suggestions for how to improve the books, many of which aligned with what residents would like to see for example cleaner blocks and improved surrounding.

Fire safety

Since the Grenfell tragedy in 2017 increased focus has rightly been on fire safety in taller buildings, particularly those which have been insulated with certain types of insulation. Therefore it is imperative that we assure our residents and communities that we have sufficient fire safety policies and protocols in place for these homes.

We have continued to monitor the recommendations and guidance that has emerged and worked with the Scottish Government's specialist team. The insulation which we installed in our blocks has been found to be in compliance with building standards at the time and does not have the same attributes as the insulation which has caused concern elsewhere. However, we continue to keep it under review because frankly it is too important not to.

As a result of this strategy, we intend to review the key protocols and practices that will help us ensure that these homes are as safe as any other.

Day to day fire safety

Responsible premises officer:

This person is the key point of contact within WDC for all aspects of health and safety within the blocks. They are responsible for ensuring that all checks are completed and concerns dealt with.

They are also responsible for liaising with Scottish Fire and Rescue and any concerns they may raise. Scottish Fire and Rescue visit the blocks regularly and inspect various elements such as fire doors and report back to WDC as factor and landlord any actions which need to be taken.

Caretakers:

Each block has a caretaker who is on site daily, in addition to duties such as cleaning the caretakers are responsible for ensuring all landings and stairwells are clear of obstructions and reporting any issues for example broken fire doors to repairs and maintenance.

Repairs and maintenance specialist team:

We are trialling a new specialist team utilising Martec who supply and maintain the fire doors, who will survey the blocks and organise repairs. The trial started in August 2022 and we will keep this under review.

Fire Risk Assessments:

Fire risk assessments (FRAs) are standard assessments which are required for some types of residential accommodation such as multi-storey blocks. They need to be undertaken and reviewed regularly. We last had FRAs undertaken on the multi-storey blocks in 2017.

The guidance for FRAs has been updated and we are looking to get refreshed assessments undertaken, these are currently out for procurement. We would also like to supplement this with some fire engineering advice to ensure we have all required information to support our long term fire safety in the blocks.

As part of the procurement strategy we considered various options and engagement with the H&S team found that they did not have the capacity to carry out this scale of FRA and thus it was agreed that these would be completed by external consultants, who can also provide us with the specialist fire engineering advice.

However, the internal H&S team have been, and will continue to be, involved in procuring and overseeing the appointment of consultants to complete FRAs and they will help us maintain our documentation going forward which in turn will help ensure our homes are compliant with the required standards.

Action: Carry out refreshed fire risk assessments for all blocks and action any identified safety enhancements.

Asset investment

Surveys

The blocks were built in the 1960s of concrete panels and are now nearing 60 years old consequently it is important that we survey the fabric to ensure they are in good condition. The need for these building fabric survey was highlight by residents who complained about dampness, mould and poor ventilation alongside issues with drainage.

We need to understand the cause of these problems and target any remediation works. Having quality building fabric information will also provide a foundation for future investment, for example by enabling us to enhance the energy efficiency of the homes which was also identified as a priority by residents.

Action: Scope and procure building fabric surveys for all blocks.

Action: Install damp and mould sensors in tenanted properties as a priority

In the meantime, we recommend installing damp and mould sensors in all tenanted multi storey homes. These sensors will help tenants maintain a healthy home whilst providing us with information about which homes are experiencing problems so we can take action to help. This will support the building fabric survey. As per the capital programme paper, we ask that multi storey properties are prioritised.

Energy efficiency improvements

Our multi storey homes have already received external wall insulation (EWI) between 2010 and 2014 but residents expressed an ambition for this to be enhanced. However, the heating and hot water systems in the multistoreys were one of the

resident's main gripes with many citing the costs of heating their home and the lack of flexibility due to the current typically overnight charging methods. This was applicable to those blocks which have electric storage heaters.

Action: We will carry out a heating and hot water options appraisal for all blocks

For some blocks of flats (Littleholm and Dalmuir) the preferred heating replacement will be connect them to the Queens Quay district heating system. A business case to establish costs for this is being worked on by the team at WDC responsible for the district heating. This would offer these residents a low carbon and efficient heating system.

For the remaining blocks other options will be investigated, the scale of multi storey flats offers an opportunity for communal or shared systems and these will be investigated.

A heating and hot water options appraisal will take time and technology is evolving but all options should be considered for example ground source heat pumps, air source heat pumps and modern electric storage heaters.

In the meantime we recommend extending the Connected Response pilot to include all tenanted properties with electric storage heating in the multis. These smart heating and hot water controls move users off the radio tele switch and onto a digital one which gives more control over charging which in turns allows users to access better tariffs and get smart meters. This can help residents use their systems more efficiently with the potential of saving money and energy.

Action: Install Connected Response smart switches in tenanted properties to improve tenant experience of electric storage heaters.

Lifts

Lifts are a crucial element of life in a multi storey block and are an attractive feature compared to tenement blocks which do not have lifts to any floors. However, when lifts breakdown this is understandably problematic for residents.

Therefore we are working to ensure that when lifts break they are out of action for as short a time as possible and all residents are communicated with regarding timescales as quickly as possible. Our recent survey highlighted the importance of communication and speedy repairs for residents.

Breakdown policy

The Council have recently introduced a new lift breakdown policy for alerting residents and residents when one or more lift in their block is down. This policy will be supplemented with text messages with residents and residents to update them in real time to timescales regarding repairs.

Long term strategy

Lifts in our blocks have a maintenance cycle which sees them checked annually by our appointed contractor. The same contractor also responds to and repairs any issues with the lifts when they breakdown. To assist this contractor, the repairs and maintenance team have been reviewing frequent repairs to try and identify and keep in stock commonly needed parts.

Kitchens and bathrooms

The recent survey highlighted the importance of kitchen and bathroom upgrades for residents. This is something they have requested to enhance their home and as such we will review our asset investment programme for kitchens and bathrooms to make sure these are being updated within appropriate timescales.

Action: Review asset investment in kitchens, bathrooms and windows

Noise insulation pilot

Whilst some noise is to be expected we will pilot noise insulation options either in void properties or in partnership with residents. If successful then the pilot could be extended to more homes in the blocks to help deal with noise transfer between homes.

Action: Pilot noise insulation in homes (initially void properties)

WIFI

As our homes become smarter and more systems look to utilise internet it is important we ensure that our multis have excellent connectivity to enable both ourselves and residents to utilise smart home devices.

Our recent survey highlighted that some residents have frustrations with their current options for Wi-Fi and TV for example not being able to get certain types of Sky or a smart meter. Whilst we are not responsible for utilities we will investigate if there are steps we could take to help improve options for our residents and the possibility of becoming more involved in the provision.

Action: Investigate improving Wi-Fi choice in the blocks

Outcome:

Ongoing investment in our homes is important and procuring building fabric surveys will provide the foundation for future investments which our residents have highlighted as important to them such as heating, hot water and energy efficiency enhancements.

In the meantime the installation of damp and mould sensors will empower our tenants to manage the moisture in their homes whilst providing us with data on moisture in our homes to help us take targeted action to tackle it.

Similarly, the connected response switches offer an opportunity to improve the storage heaters and hot water systems by changes residents over to digital switches which unlocks the option of better off peak tariffs and smart meters.

The pilot of noise insulation options in void properties and in conjunction with residents will help us trial building fabric measures to improve noise between properties.

Common spaces (lobbies, landings and cleaning)

The common areas of a block of flats represent first impressions but also receive a lot of traffic from residents and their friends, family, delivery and trades people. It is clear from the survey findings that residents would like to see these spaces improved.

Refurbish common spaces

On the biggest asks from residents was to refurbish the common areas alongside improvement to laundries (where available), store rooms and signage all of which combine to make a more attractive and welcome first impression. Ultimately this will need to be developed with residents but the initial scoping works will seek to understand possible improvements based upon initial suggestions.

Action: Investigate options to refurbish foyers and closes

Deep cleaning of closes, landings and foyers

Residents expressed an ambition for closes and foyers to be cleaner and suggested that deep cleans would be beneficial. We will pilot deep cleaning the common areas of the blocks a couple of times per year and review if this improves satisfaction. Caretakers will still be responsible for day to day cleaning.

Action: Scope and procure a deep clean contract for all the blocks on a 2 year pilot basis initially

Enhanced CCTV and emergency lighting

In addition to refurbishing and deep cleaning common areas, residents expressed ambitions for improved CCTV coverage and lighting in their blocks to make them feel safer and discourage ASB. Initial discussions with colleagues in consultancy services suggests that this will require a specialist design and build contract to supply and fit these systems safely and thus it may benefit from being tied into other works such foyer refurbishment.

Action: Scope works contract for CCTV and emergency lighting

Outcome:

Combined these enhancements offer the potential to improve the common spaces in our blocks which our residents have told us are important to them. The caretakers will continue to be responsible for keeping the common areas clean on a day to day basis alongside reporting any repairs needed to the fire doors and ensuring that any rubbish is removed but the actions identified here seek to enhance the existing offer.

Surrounding green space and amenities

The recent Covid -19 pandemic has highlighted to many of us the value in our local green spaces and parks, whilst residents of multi storey flats do not have their own gardens or balconies many of the blocks have nearby grassed and green spaces or are nearby sources of water such as canals and the River Clyde.

Indeed many of those responding to our survey highlighted the amenities near their flats as one of their top attributes of their homes. Tenants mentioned access to the shops, transport links, sport facilities and parks as very important to them.

Looking to the immediate area around their homes many of the residents have suggested that the areas around their homes could be improved for example by creating spaces to sit, tidying it up, providing children's play spaces or increasing, or improving, parking provision. Each block has specific needs so this will be developed in conjunction with residents.

Action: Develop in conjunction with residents plans to improve the immediate greenspace/ parking around their blocks.

Waste Strategy

As the council works to deliver its Climate Change Strategy and achieve national targets around reducing waste sent to landfill, helping all residents and particularly those living in flats to reduce their waste and recycle as much as they can is vitally important. Currently all the multi storey blocks of flats are serviced by a central bin chute. This does not separate waste and is instead taken to landfill. The bin chutes in the flats whilst convenient were identified in the survey as being smelly, noisy and susceptible to blocking.

We have formed a working group which will consider various options for improving waste management within the blocks with an emphasis on making it easier to recycle. For example, we will work with the waste team to supply additional recycling bins for tenants in the first instance because many residents told us they didn't have them or there weren't enough. This may require investment in bin stores or similar to ensure they are housed safely.

Action: Instigate a working group to improve waste management and investigate new solutions

Action: Supply more recycling bins to the multi storey blocks

Management

Multi storey flats offer a comparatively dense form of housing and whilst this often brings benefits such as sustaining demand for local shops and bus services, it does mean that everyone is living in quite close proximity of one another which can bring complaints for example noise or smells.

The behaviours of other residents were identified as the source of dissatisfaction amongst residents. Whilst we cannot control individuals, we can work to encourage respectful behaviour through management and policy.

We will review our policies and utilise communication methods to remind residents of our policies such as how to report ASB and the lift protocol. Some reviews may require some investment such as controlled access to laundry rooms or additional staff during evenings and weekends.

Action: Review housing management policies in relation to resident identified areas of concern such as laundry etiquette, ASB, dogs.