Fire safety experts set to visit every council high-rise block in coming weeks

FIRE service safety experts are visiting every council high-rise block over the coming weeks as part of their annual safety audit of the buildings.

Councillors were told last night the measure is part of yearly inspections carried out at the sites but is timely reassurance for tenants coming so soon after the Grenfell Tower fire in London.

Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Housing, Energy and Building Services, gave councillors at Full Council a special briefing about steps taken by the council since last week’s tragedy.

She said: “I want to reassure residents in our high-rise accommodation that their safety is our first concern. Although the cladding used in Grenfell Tower has not yet been confirmed, none of our high-rise properties are clad with the materials said to have been used there.

"The annual fire safety reviews of these buildings conducted by Mid and West Wales Fire Service have already started and will be completed over the coming weeks. Although these inspections were due anyway, they are timely and will provide further reassurance for tenants."

The briefing to councillors last night covered a wide range of matters raised in the wake of the fire in London.

Cllr Lewis said: “It’s been a week since that terrible incident and our thoughts and concerns are with those affected and their families. I also want to pay tribute to the magnificent effort of the emergency services and the local communities who have rallied round. The people of Swansea stand with them.”

She said: “Over the coming weeks and months more information about the causes of the fire will emerge. We welcome the government's decision to produce an interim report from the public inquiry that’s been planned. In the meantime Swansea Council is conducting its own thorough inspections and anything which needs to be acted on will be acted upon swiftly.”

We will look at the possibility of retro-fitting sprinkler systems in high-rise homes to add to hard-wired smoke alarms and one-hour resistant fire doors which are fitted to every flat.

Councillors were also told all tenants are given fire safety leaflets and advice when they take on tenancies in the flats. There is also further information available in communal areas on every floor.
Recent work on some of the council’s high-rise buildings to fit cladding have all been completed using non-combustible materials with fire-breaks fitted.

Dry-risers – integrated tubes which feed large quantities of water to all floors in the event of a fire – are fitted in all 11 high-rise buildings, meaning that fire-fighters have access to the water they need to reach all properties should there be an incident.

Cllr Lewis said: “The fire service offer all residents free fire safety checks for their homes. Communal areas are inspected regularly by council staff to make sure they are free from obstruction or combustible materials and tenants are asked to play their part in this.

“We are never complacent when it comes to fire safety. That’s why our staff visited all our high-rise blocks the morning after last week’s tragic events, hand-delivering letters to every home providing advice and reassurance.

“Every tenant has the right to feel safe and secure in their own home and I hope the steps we have taken and the commitments we have made will reassure tenants now and in the months ahead.”

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