

Fire and Smoke Alarms in Midlothian

Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Report for Noting

1 Recommendations

Council is recommended to note this report, advising that Care and Repair Scotland has awarded funding to the claim submitted for grant assistance to eligible householders in Midlothian.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

At the meeting of Midlothian Council on 15th February 2022, a report was provided in Fire and Smoke Alarms in Scotland, regarding the legislative change requiring that every home in Scotland must have interlinked fire alarms by February 2020.

The legislation applies to all property owners, including those who own private homes and it is the property owner's responsibility to pay for and install the alarms. This report is in response to the request from members to update on any additional support and assistance available.

Date: 9 March 2022

Report Contact: Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

email: kevin.anderson@midlothian.gov.uk

tel: 0131 271 3102

3 Background

The Council's obligations as a landlord to have installed the fire and smoke alarm devices in the council housing stock are met.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service received £1m from Scottish Government to install alarms in homes of people at highest risk and the government has also provided £500,000 to help disabled and older people who meet the criteria, with an extra allocation awarded prior to the regulations commencing from February to Care and Repair Scotland, which intends to target some of this additional funding to Council areas that do not have a Care and Repair service.

There is not currently an established Care & Repair Service in Midlothian, although funding was previously provided to support a local enterprise to deliver this but that proved unsustainable and the service subsequently closed. However, the Local Housing Strategy agreed at Council last year, and also the IJB Strategic Plan each committed to explore the feasibility to develop a care and repair service provision in 2022/23 and that work is in progress.

Meantime, a successful bid was submitted to Care and Repair Scotland for the additional funds available to local authorities which have no current scheme and an award of £10,000.00 to Midlothian Council to enable eligible Midlothian residents to benefit from the available funding and comply with the new legislation.

The Scottish Government has requested this is used to bulk purchase alarms so that by the financial year-end there is an indication of how many alarms the £1M funding purchased, while installation will progress in the financial years 2022/23.

Eligibility for support from Care & Repair Scotland criteria is that householders must live and own their home, which has a Council Tax banding of A-C. Applicants must also either be of state pension age and in receipt of guaranteed Pension Credit, or have a disability and be in a support group for Employment and Support Allowance.

The process is currently being finalised for eligible households to access available devices and this shall be publicised accordingly.

4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

4.1 Resource

There are no Council resource implications related to this report.

4.2 Digital

There are no digital implications related to this report.

4.3 Risk

Any enforcement of the legislation sits with local authorities and this would be pursued through our Protective Services. However, Scottish Government have made clear prior to the enactment that there is no expectation of councils pursuing enforcement at this time for domestic properties.

The Scottish Government has indicated that councils could require homeowners to carry out work, but it did not expect them to go beyond advising property owners about fire alarms.

In our landlord responsibilities; with the potential exception of any property in which we've not been able to gain access, around 7,000 Council homes have interlinked fire alarms installed. There are cases in major works where access is denied, or we have tenants in hospital or terminally ill, where we do not enforce entry and those properties are rescheduled at a later date, or when it is returned as a void when vacated and the works completed then.

4.4 Ensuring Equalities

The requirement is to have all alarms interlinked so people in a house will be alerted immediately.

4.5 Additional Report Implications

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Not applicable

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious

A.4 Delivering Best Value

There are no direct implications related to this report.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Not applicable

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Not applicable

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

As a council we are encouraging householders to install the alarms to help save lives, we will not be penalising anyone who needs more time to comply with the new rules. Our approach, which takes into account people's individual circumstances and the pressure of the pandemic, is in line with the views of the Scottish Government and the umbrella organisation representation local councils across Scotland, CoSLA.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The government will use statistics from the Scottish House Condition Survey to assess overall compliance at a local authority level. Compliance will also form part of any Home Report when homes are placed on the market.