

Crawley Borough Council

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission 1 November 2021

Major Works at Milton Mount Flats

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive, **DCE/10**

1. Introduction & Purpose

1.1 Under Scrutiny Procedure Rules in the Constitution, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission has requested for a review of the Major Works at Milton Mount Flats following a request by the Chair Councillor Tina Belben. The focus of the request was specific to the mains cold water replacement as part of a wider programme of works to Milton Mount flats. The request sought reassurance and evidence that:

- The building mains pressure from the mains water supplier (Southern Water) had not dropped over the last five years so that pressure related issues were solely down to the buildings existing pipework. It was requested that this should be corroborated by Southern Water in evidence of past/present pressure rates, and their attendance at Overview and Scrutiny Commission was also requested.
- There a need for the replacement of the building's mains cold water supply, are the costs reasonable, and have Leaseholders alternatives been properly considered using a cheaper solution.

1.2 This report addresses these requests and provides members of the Commission with an overview on the rationale in proposing the replacement of the mains cold water services to Milton Mount. This is inclusive of the consultation process with Southern Water, and Mechanical Consultants, to realise a proposal that meets statutory requirements and is considered as industry best practice, respectively. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to secure the attendance of Southern Water at the meeting.

2. Scope

2.1 The Section 20 process of consultation with leaseholders has come to an end and the works discussed in this report are being commissioned. Whilst this report does not therefore form any part of the decision-making process, this review presents a welcome opportunity to retrospectively explore this case and reflect on the challenges of undertaking major works in blocks containing both the Council's tenants, but also leaseholders.

3. Background & Timeline

- 3.1 Crawley Borough Council is the Freeholder of 1A – 718 Milton Mount, a block of 146 flats with the tenure type being roughly half Crawley Homes' tenants and half private leasehold ownership. Constructed in 1973 the block is set over nine stories and comprises of brick and block cavity walls, with a reinforced concrete separation between floors and flat roof.
- 3.2 In 2017 Crawley Homes began preparing for a major works programme at Milton Mount and had begun consultation with residents on the proposed scope and impact of the works. The replacement of the mains cold water services was not included in that original programme, but reports then emerged from residents and operatives about extremely low pressures being experienced in the building and it became apparent that the replacement of the cold water mains was considered a requirement. Consequently, the works programme was put on hold. In August 2020 this issue was exacerbated by a number of burst mains pipes in the local area which resulted in no mains water on the top floor of Milton Mount.
- 3.3 Crawley Homes engaged Pinnacle in March 2018 to develop a solution, however Southern Water Developer Services rejected all proposed designs for the least possible intrusive solutions. Finally, in October 2019 agreement was secured for a proposed external supply solution with the full design approved in February 2020. A Planning Application was submitted in [June 2020](#) with approval being granted in [November 2020](#). In 2021 a programme of Major Works that now included the replacement of the cold water mains was finalised and submitted to Leaseholders for statutory consultation.

4. Mains Water Supply

- 4.1 The first reported issues with the mains cold water pressure were in late 2017, conveyed at a leaseholders meeting. In 2018 further reports of extremely poor water pressure to various flats within the block were received. Following an initial investigation of the pipework an issue was found with the existing cold water rising main supply serving several flats. A specialist consultant, Pinnacle, were engaged to investigate. Their report found the existing pipework to be severely restricted causing a reduction in the water pressure and reducing the amount of water flowing through the pipes. This resulted in poor water pressure throughout the block, especially flats on the high floor levels.
- 4.2 The report recommended replacement the existing cold water services with a new system with the inclusion of a pumping station to provide sufficient pressure. Due to the design of the existing building and the location of the cold water supplies (being located in a very restrictive service duct within the centre of each flat), the design proposed the new water supplies should be delivered by two external risers which would enter the building at each floor level.
- 4.3 The council's proposal to Southern Water was to install 18 cold water mains risers, supplied by a ring main below ground, external to the block, mirroring the SGN replacement gas risers. The supply to each floor would then 'tee off' to service each

flat, directly into the kitchen. This proposal was considered to be the least impactful way to replace the mains water supply, and also the least costly option.

- 4.4 On 7 August 2018 Southern Water Developer Services informed the council that this proposal was deemed as unacceptable as it would result in internal metering which does not adhere to their requirements. Following further correspondence Southern Water confirmed on 28 September 2018 that their policy is that no external water risers can be allowed on the building.
- 4.5 Due to Southern Water's insistence that external metering must be provided for a new mains cold water connection, further work was undertaken with Pinnacle to develop an alternative design. This subsequent proposal was to run two large external risers to 'tee off' and enter the building at each floor and then to run reduced pipework internally to 'tee off' into each flat. This allowed for external individual metering of each flat.
- 4.6 This proposal met all other design requirements, and was considered best industry practice by Pinnacle. This design was deemed acceptable by Southern Water, and has been adopted within the agreed major works programme. This design is however more intrusive and costly, and has a wider impact on the building, including the replacement of windows located within the lift foyer areas, as this is where the new cold water services will enter the building.

5. Southern Water

- 5.1 Southern Water were invited to contribute to this report and attend the meeting of the OSC, however they did not respond to the Council's request.
- 5.2 During communication with Pinnacle the following response to leaseholder queries that emerged during the consultation was provided, relating to the minimum pressure that water companies must provide:

'Water companies are only legally required (statutory service standard level) to provide a water pressure of 1bar to the site. Sites may benefit from a higher pressure but this is not guaranteed and as experienced in 2020 a leak or leaks in the area left Milton Mount Starved of water pressure. As previously stated the project is more than just about water pressure, it is to replace a life expired infrastructure to ensure a wholesome supply of water is readily available to the Tenants of the building for years to come.'

'The Water Authority are only legally obliged (Water Supply and Sewerage Service (Customer Service Standards) Regulations) to provide a pressure of 0.7 Bar (7 metres head) at the boundary of the site and whilst supply pressures can be higher, they are not guaranteed. In simple terms it means that, at the guaranteed pressure, the water would only be able to rise approximately 7 metres vertically (less frictional pressure drop) irrespective of pipe size.'

- 5.3 Southern Water were therefore meeting their statutory and contractual obligations.

6. Further Evidence of Need

- 6.1 In order to reassure leaseholders that issues are present with the existing mains cold water supply, a report in numbers of instances of reported low pressure was issued, a survey to residents was undertaken ('Milton Mount Residents Survey 2021 Report' Appendix A), and flow and pressure readings ('Milton Mount Water Pressure Record 2021' Appendix B) were taken within individual flats.
- 6.2 Reports of low pressure are extensive, with the residents' survey demonstrating that almost half of the respondents have had issues with water pressure. The pressure testing demonstrates that there is a widespread issue with water pressure, especially on the upper floors of the building where flats were recorded as having 0 bar working pressure, and 0 litres per minute working flow rate.

7. Costs

- 7.1 The design arrived at to replace the mains water supply represents the only option available for the reasons set out above. Costs were competitively tendered by the Principle Contractor, and all submitted costs were benchmarked by an Independent Quantity Surveyor in a tender analysis. This information has been submitted to leaseholders.
- 7.2 It is the view of the author that the extensive consultation that Crawley Borough Council have undertaken with the network provider and specialist consultant demonstrate that sufficient due diligence has been undertaken on the progression of this proposal.

8. Leaseholder Cost Saving suggestion

- 8.1 Leaseholders have suggested that the existing pipework could be descaled. This is not considered to be a responsible course of action for the Landlord to take and would present an unquantifiable risk in potentially catastrophically damaging the existing pipework, either in the restricted service ducts or under the ground. Pinnacle consider the existing pipework to be 'time expired', and therefore in need of replacement.
- 8.2 Leaseholder have also suggested that it might be cheaper to install new pipework in the existing service void situated within the building's core. This would result in internal metering and as set out above Southern Water have explicitly stated that internal metering is not permissible. Furthermore running pipework internally would involve digging a trench in communal corridor at 750mm to supply new mains, and a trench into the flats of lowest floor to supply dwellings which is not a viable option in terms of overall cost, and unreasonable inconvenience to ground floor dwellings.

9. Further Considerations

- 9.1 No action would result in multiple flats continue to be subject to low standing pressure, with no working pressure, furthermore this could be considered as a failure of the Landlord's obligations under the terms and conditions of Lease and Tenancy agreements.

9.2 Full, extensive and relevant consultation has taken statutory bodies, industry experts and Leaseholders to realise a suitable proposal for replacement of the mains cold water services. It is considered that the council has undertaken the necessary due diligence in formulating said proposal.

10. Other works

10.1 Whilst this was not requested within the referral, for completeness officers have included below a brief outline of the other works included within the programme and the reasons for their inclusion:

- Cross corridor fire doors were inspected (FDIS) and recommendations came back that to meet current fire standards communal doors should be replaced to maintain the integrity of the building and fire escape routes. This follows many programmes of preventative maintenance on the buildings original cross corridor doors to meet the FD30s standard.
- A Fire & Rescue Service Operated Evacuation System is recommended in domestic buildings block of flats over 18 meters, and is controlled solely by the Fire and Rescue Service to evacuate the building in phases, or in specific areas if required.
- There is currently separate general use and emergency light fittings in the communal areas of Milton Mount, all using standard fluorescent light fittings. The proposal is to replace all fittings with new LED units which will combine both communal lighting and emergency lights.
- Also, due to the levels of Anti-Social Behaviour and following on going issues of vandalism within the block, especially to the lifts, refuse areas and fly tipping around the site the proposal is to install CCTV cameras to all front and rear entrances, all lift foyer areas and associated staircases.

Report author:

Geoff Tarran

Asset Surveyor and Compliance Manager

Geoff.Tarran@crawley.gov.uk

Contact officer:

Rob Beasey

Planned Maintenance Manager

Robert.Beasey@crawley.gov.uk