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Underinvestment hits most vulnerable

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The “most vulnerable” people in Woking will be made to find new homes after their extra care facility failed vital fire safety checks and was “all but condemned”. Brockhill Extra Care Housing, in Clifton Way, has space for 48 apartments over two floors with a waiting list to get in.

In February this year **Surrey Fire and Rescue** conducted a review of the home prompting Woking Borough Council to introduce a Waking Watch – where trained people continually patrol a building and its perimeter to detect fires and raise alarms.

The facility changed its emergency procedures from Stay Put to Evacuate. The council also upgraded its fire detection systems. Many still can’t evacuate the building fast enough, leaving the bankrupt council with the decision of spending £5.8 million on a complete refit, or closing the fire trap.

A meeting of its executive committee, on Thursday, December 14, concluded the home open was no longer viable, regardless of the council’s finances, and residents, families and other stakeholders would be consulted over the closure of the Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme. According to papers presented to councillors, the building appears to have had limited investment with only minor works carried – meaning it now requires “major capital works over the next two years and beyond”.

Its’ boiler failed a year ago causing “considerable inconvenience and discomfort to residents and staff” and is beyond repair.

Residents currently rely on a temporary heating but the entire system is “aged and in poor condition and requires upgrading and renewing. Since then, no new people have been allowed to move to the home, occupancy has dropped to 68 per cent and, where possible, the council has tried to moved residents to the ground floor to aid evacuation.

The anticipated total capital expenditure required on Brockhill over the next 10 years is forecast to be about £5.8 million, according to the report.

Deputy leader of the council, Cllr Will Forster, said: “The fire risk assessment has all but condemned that building. Particularly with the clients that we have in there. They are just so vulnerable, they have to leave the building so quickly in the event of a fire, because of the type of building it is. And that’s just not humanly possible for them.”

Any decision around Brockhill will have implications and put additional cost pressures on adult social care budgets with the council admitting that this will be difficult and upsetting for people living and working Brockhill, as well as the families of residents living there.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker said: “Its obviously heartbreaking for me to see this.
“I know what a well loved and valued facility it is.” She added: “But we have had a significant fire risk arising from a fire brigade assessment. We’ve known some of this work was needed we’ve been working in the last year we’ve done work on fire doors fire alarms, having a waking watching place to protect residents but the fire services have now determined that its just not safe for the most vulnerable and it’s so urgent that those most vulnerable people do need to move as soon as possible.”

Cllr Ellen Nicholson (LD, Mount Hermon) said: “The residents there are some of the most vulnerable in Woking and I find it incredibly sad that the chronic underprovision and the legacy of mismanagement has led to these fire risks and these safety risks for these incredibly vulnerable people.”

Image Brockhill care home – Google

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