

ANGUS COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE – 3 June 2004

THREEWELLS AREA, FORFAR – ARTEX CEILINGS

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

**ABSTRACT**

This report explains the need to manage the future of the Artex ceiling finish (containing a small percentage of asbestos fibre) in these properties in Threewells Drive and Threewells Place, Forfar

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee are asked to agree the proposals for managing the presence of a small amount of asbestos in the ceilings of these properties as outlined in this report.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

The area of housing in Threewells, Forfar, in particular the properties in Threewells Drive and Threewells Place, were built in approximately 1973 or 1974. At this time, ceilings within the houses and flats were made of plasterboard or concrete and finished with a textured coating called "Artex". This material was in common use at the time, and has a rough textured appearance, which was often useful in covering rough surfaces. However, this material can contain a small proportion of white asbestos, as a binder within the material. This small percentage of asbestos (typically 1%-4%) means that the Artex ceiling coating in these properties falls within the Control of Asbestos at Work Act, and therefore requires certain measures to be adopted when it is disturbed. The material is perfectly safe until it is disturbed, when there is a very small risk that white asbestos fibres may be released.

The Council currently own 73 properties in the area, 62 in Threewells Drive and 11 in Threewells Place. Many other properties have been sold to tenants. These Council properties are currently in The Heating Replacement Programme, and will have their heating replaced over the next 6 to 9 months.

**3. PROPOSAL**

As the replacement of the heating systems in these properties is carried out, it is also intended to rewire them. However due to the presence of the Artex coating on the ceilings, it is preferable not to disturb the lighting pendants in each room as this may pose a risk that some fibres within the Artex are released into the room. It is therefore proposed to delay the rewiring of the lighting circuits, which are perfectly safe at present, and carry this work out in conjunction with tenants redecoration plans, or when the properties are empty at a change of tenancy.

It is therefore proposed that the heating replacement programme continues as planned, including a partial rewire but excluding the lighting circuits. The Housing Service will compile a leaflet to issue to all tenants in these affected properties,

explaining why the lighting has been omitted and that the Artex ceiling finish should not be scraped, drilled or damaged in any way until further notice. The Housing Service will offer tenants the options of having their ceilings replaced at a convenient time, or when they wish to redecorate the room, in which case the removal of the Artex material can be carried out by specialist contractors in accordance with current asbestos management regulations. The ceilings can be done on a room-by-room basis, or when the property is empty. All the ceilings coated with Artex will therefore be replaced as a matter of course. In this way the small risk to tenants of coming into contact with this material will be minimised, and the risk to tenants managed properly.

As there are many ex-council properties in the area, which may have this material on their ceilings, a leaflet will be sent to them explaining the position .

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of the remedial work to these properties can be met from the Planned Maintenance Budget for 2004/2005, or subsequent years as appropriate.

It is also proposed to pay a Home Improvement Package (HIP) payment of £20 per room where the tenant requests the Artex to be removed, to compensate for the disturbance caused by having the ceiling replced.

#### **5. HUMAN RIGHTS**

It is considered that in following the recommendation in this report the Council would not be acting in any way which is incompatible with Human Rights.

#### **6. CONSULTATION**

In preparing this report, consultation has taken place with the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law & Administration and Director of Property Services.

#### **7. CONCLUSION**

The Artex material in the ceilings of the Threewells area contains a small amount of white asbestos, and therefore must be managed to ensure there is no risk either to tenants or to workmen sent to carry out any repairs that may involve disturbing the material. The proposals referred to above will minimise the risk to tenants where this material still exists, and outlines a plan to remove the material entirely, and therefore remove the risk. Some work can be carried out with tenants agreement in the houses on a room by room basis, and at other times, when the house is empty, all rooms can be treated.

The same procedure would apply if other houses are discovered in other areas of Angus with the same type of finish, as not only was this material sometimes specified in building contracts, it was widely available in the DIY market. Tenants may have applied this material themselves over the years, and should this material be discovered, it will be tested in accordance with current procedures to establish whether or not it contains asbestos. If so then the above solutions will be offered to the tenants, or it will removed at a change of tenancy when the house is vacant.

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Director of Housing

Note:- No background papers, as defined by Section 50d of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied upon to a material extent in preparing this report.