

Residents say their lifts at Coillesdene House are worn out – and they are too

In a multi-storey building in Coillesdene there are lifts which are not working reliably all of the time.

This problem has been ongoing since last November, and continued all the way through Christmas and New Year. Residents, some elderly, have been stuck in the lifts.

There are 41 properties in one block, with six council tenants among the 35 private owners. The council, through their building manager, has overseen lift maintenance in the past, but now residents say lack of communication from the council is getting in the way of either a proper repair or replacement being carried out.

The deputation to the council meeting on Thursday was delivered by Maria Riaza-Sanchez, Secretary of the Coillesdene House Residents Association, and the Acting Chair, Jane Murray. Ms Murray said after the meeting that their hope is that "The council will find a way of communicating with us what's going on that we're left blind, which is quite a fearful situation for many of the residents and also the

people do become apathetic and lethargic. We don't know if we're paying for this. If we are, if we're not, there's nothing, just nothing."



Coillesdene House, Joppa

The two women were still shaking after making their very first visit to the City Chambers, but felt it was worth them stating their case.

Maria said that some elderly people had become stuck in the lifts, and one in particular had become quite distressed. If the lift gets stuck she said the doors eventually open but the person may be stuck there for 20 minutes to half an hour before that happens.

She explained the process if the lift stops working. She said: "We need to call to the repairs department at the council – this is what has been suggested to us. However they never reply. There is an emergency call-out but it takes sometimes 24 hours or more."

One of the residents now calls the lift engineers direct, but they have no idea if that is the correct way to report faults or not.

During their presentation the residents said that they felt unheard, unimportant and unsupported, mainly due to the brief information which had been provided by council officers.

The residents association contacted their local councillors, Citizens Advice and people in the housing department "a little higher up" to get themselves heard.

It was explained to councillors that 22 residents wrote letters to the council. These were digitised and sent to their local councillors on 18 January.

And they admit that the councillors have been quite helpful, particularly the SNP and the Green councillors.

But even so it was only yesterday that the council convened a meeting with the Residents Association after the Housing Association had contacted another council officer asking for

some discussion of the problems.



Jane Murray who lives in Coillesdene House where lifts have been unreliable since November 2022. PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

The residents have had to rely on unofficial information from their lift engineers (several different ones) about the lifts. They feel that the situation could have been avoided with pre-planning.

And they claim that on occasion the lifts have recently been fixed with second hand parts as it is difficult to source parts for 60-year-old lifts.

At the meeting held yesterday the residents listed the details of dates and times of the many callouts they have had to make as a matter of record for the councillors.

The residents explained that “with 41 homes – some people are working and others are not. We have had to collate all the information ourselves.

“What is the point of throwing good money after bad? The lifts are obviously worn out and so are we. If we go private how would that work? Common sense tells us to stay with the council.

“Had the council communicated with us then we would not be here now. There has been a lack of care or thought for those stuck in their houses – we are now in isolation again because of the lifts – and this is particularly bad after the isolation of Covid.”

Asked how the council can keep the flow of communication going, the residents replied that the communication was awful. They said: “We tried to contact the building manager who was on annual leave. We contacted the NE locality manager – we were not getting any information. One of our residents then contacted a councillor on Twitter – this is not the way to get things done. We must set up a line of communication for this type of emergency.”

Cllr Jones commented: “Two words. Completely unacceptable. Have you had official notification from the council that the lifts need to be replaced?”

But the residents replied: “That is the problem we have had no notification. The engineers say the lifts are old and they cannot get parts. They are using second hand parts from other already broken lifts. We have elderly residents and younger residents with disabilities. But the simple answer is no.

“We got told that a lift would be fixed on 16 January but that never happened. Yesterday I was at a meeting and we think it is necessary to have a meeting of residents and the council to talk about these lifts which are more than 60 years old. We have to discuss the funding.”

Cllr Alys Mumford said: “It is really important to understand the impact on people’s lives. Are there things you would like to see happening in future to deal with matters of

maintenance?”

The reply was forthright: “We would like to get into a lift without fear of it breaking down. The fire exit is also open and anyone can have access to all floors in the building.”

The Housing Convener, Cllr Jane Meagher, asked if the residents had noticed any change since the new contractor appointed to maintain the lifts took over the contract, but the residents replied that they had spoken to several engineers who said their lifts have “behaved quite well until the last 18 months”. They confirmed that the only callout made previously was some vandalism to the buttons in the lifts so the residents felt unable to comment fully as to any improvement in matters being dealt with.

Cllr Jane Meagher, Housing Convener, said: “I feel very much for the plight of the 6 council tenants and 35 owners in this block. Working lifts are clearly vital, but the repairs in Coillesdene House are becoming more complex given the age and profile of the lifts, resulting in an increased risk of further faults/failures.

“So Edinburgh’s Shared Repairs Service Senior Manager met with residents yesterday and recommended discussion on the options available to property owners to commission a survey and possible lift replacement programme. Officers will set up a public Q & A meeting in early March 2023 to talk this through with members of the Residents Association and the wider group of residents in the building.”

