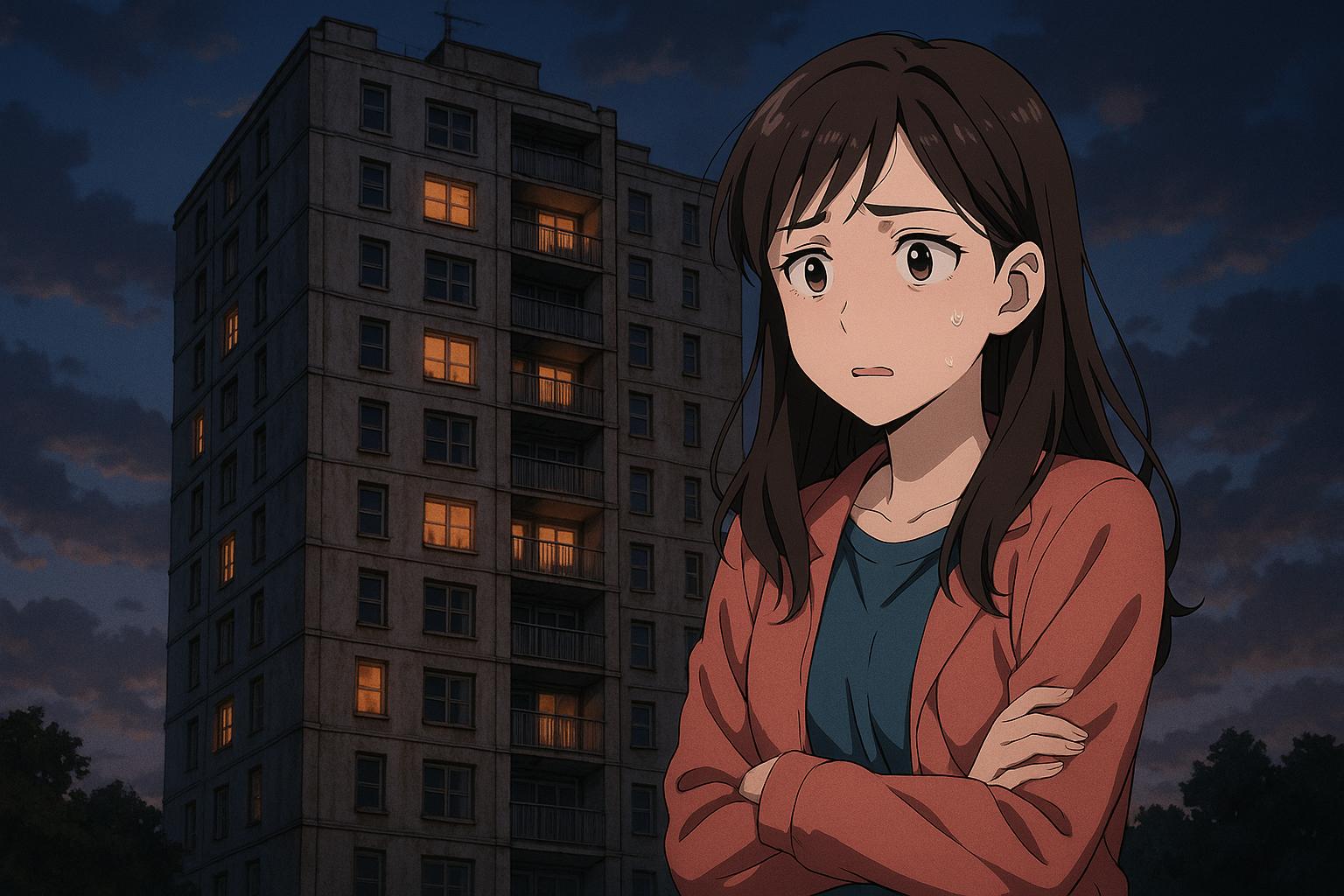
# Edinburgh council under fire for five-year delay on Westfield Court safety fixes



Residents of Westfield Court, a multi-storey block of flats in Edinburgh, find themselves grappling with significant and long-standing fire safety concerns that have only now come to light, five years after the risks were first identified in a council report. Completed in 1952, Westfield Court was Edinburgh’s first high-rise residential building, housing 95 flats, two-thirds of which are privately owned. Despite the council acting as the property factor, its slow response to critical fire safety issues has left residents feeling alarmed and neglected.

The origins of this distress lie in a report commissioned by the council and dated April 2020, which highlighted serious fire risks, notably the potential for flames to spread easily between flats via the building's risers. The report stated, “Currently, the risers would allow fire to penetrate numbers of flats with ease,” raising grave concerns about residents' safety. Despite these alarming findings, no immediate action was taken to remedy the hazards, leading to accusations from both residents and local officials that the council has put lives at risk.

Councillor Ross McKenzie has been vocal in his criticism of the council’s inaction. Following the recent revelation, he expressed his horror at the failure to act, stating, “I find it absolutely terrifying that the council failed to act on those words.” He indicated the necessity for accountability, having requested a formal complaint response to enable residents to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if their concerns remain unaddressed.

The council has now initiated an investigation into the handling of the matter, indicating that officers are preparing a “retrospective fire safety strategy” for Westfield Court. In a briefing on 30 April, councillors were assured that urgent works to mitigate fire risks would be undertaken using emergency powers under the Tenement (Scotland) Act 2004. Nevertheless, the delays have left residents like Marion Potter and Diane Baxter shocked and frustrated. Both women expressed disbelief that issues of such critical importance had been overlooked for so long, with Baxter stating, “Why is it that we suddenly have fire officers every day, and we’re all at risk?”

The financial burden exacerbates the situation; residents have faced soaring costs related to maintenance and communal heating, which are managed by the council. For instance, Potter's annual bills have surged from under £1,200 to nearly £3,500 in just three years. Given these increasing expenses, concerns over fire safety have added considerable strain to their already limited budgets.

In light of these events, the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee of the council has moved to address the situation. They have mandated officers to report back in June with updates on planned fire safety works and to communicate the proposed costs to residents. Furthermore, an internal audit investigation is set to review the “failure to implement fire safety recommendations,” a move welcomed by many. Councillor Danny Aston articulated the gravity of the situation, asserting that serious questions must be asked regarding the delay in information dissemination and action.

Eilidh Keay, chair of the Living Rent tenants’ union in Edinburgh, echoed the outrage among residents, stating, “Edinburgh Council has utterly failed its duties and potentially put people’s lives at risk.” She drew parallels to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, highlighting a backdrop of negligence that has been all too familiar in similar circumstances. "These recommendations should have been implemented years ago," she remarked, underscoring that residents were already struggling with outdated utility systems before being confronted with fire risks.

As the community awaits the council's next steps, the urgency of remediating these fire safety hazards cannot be overstated. The residents of Westfield Court deserve transparency and action to safeguard their homes, especially when faced with both financial and safety uncertainties that have persisted for far too long.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are informed by sources (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (7).

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edinburghlive.co.uk/news/edinburgh-news/shocked-edinburgh-residents-demand-answers-31653371> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/people/edinburgh-residents-demand-answers-over-fire-safety-risks-in-westfield-court-31653371> - Residents of Westfield Court in Edinburgh are demanding answers after a 2020 council report highlighted significant fire safety risks in the 1950s building. The report, which was not acted upon, warned that fire could easily spread between flats due to issues with the building's risers. Councillor Ross McKenzie criticized the council for inaction and called for a stage 2 complaint response, allowing residents to approach the Ombudsman. The council has initiated an investigation into the matter and plans to address the fire safety concerns urgently.
3. <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/people/edinburgh-residents-demand-answers-over-fire-safety-risks-in-westfield-court-31653371> - Residents of Westfield Court in Edinburgh are demanding answers after a 2020 council report highlighted significant fire safety risks in the 1950s building. The report, which was not acted upon, warned that fire could easily spread between flats due to issues with the building's risers. Councillor Ross McKenzie criticized the council for inaction and called for a stage 2 complaint response, allowing residents to approach the Ombudsman. The council has initiated an investigation into the matter and plans to address the fire safety concerns urgently.
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