

<p align="center">London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham</p> <p align="center">ECONOMIC REGENERATION, HOUSING AND THE ARTS</p> <p align="center">POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE</p> <p align="center">6 September 2017</p>		
FIRE SAFETY IN THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING PORTFOLIO		
Report of the Director of Property Services, Jane Martin		
Open Report		
Classification - For Policy & Advisory Review & Comment		
Key Decision: No		
Wards Affected: All		
Accountable Director: Jane Martin, Director of Property Services		
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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the council's approach to fire safety for housing. It will look at our fire safety strategy, Fire Safety Plus programme, fire risk assessments and compliance management.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.2. The Committee is invited to review and comment on the work that has been undertaken and future proposals.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

We have been working on the strategic review since March 2017. We have adapted our strategy to respond to issues raised from the Grenfell Tower fire. Full Council has endorsed the fire safety plus programme.

Following Audit Committee findings in March 2017, the revised approach to fire safety was put together. This noted key areas where a step change was required. It is also in recognition of the serious fire at Shepherds Court, Charecroft estate, on 19 August 2016. To date we have:

- Revised our fire safety strategy to reflect best practice.
- Developed strong / positive links with the London Fire Brigade (LFB).
- Set out a Fire Safety Plus investment programme that will see £20m invested into the stock over the next two years, all targeted at making sure residents' homes are safe. This includes tenants' and leaseholders' homes and goes way beyond minimum standards.

Overview of the revised approach

3.1 Fire Safety Strategy 2017

The Fire Safety Strategy sets out the vision and purpose of how we will manage fire safety. The new strategy confirms the officers responsible for contributing towards the legal duties and the roles, responsibilities and outcomes required. Checklists and process maps supplement these to ensure there is a clear audit trail, accountability, and clear timescales to conclude the required actions. The strategy includes requirements for staff training and a comprehensive training plan for all involved is being developed with the first structured training sessions being delivered to Estate Services & Security staff during August.

The strategy reflects national policy, most notably the 'person centered' risk assessments for sheltered schemes, published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (formerly the Chief Fire Officers Association). The strategy also embeds the LFB audit tool for improvement works with fire safety implications.

The revised strategy was shared with the LFB and reflects earlier feedback received from them.

Rather than seeing the strategy as a fixed and rigid approach, it will be kept under review and the council will issue updates as they become appropriate. This is particularly important in an environment where legislation and working practices may change significantly and frequently.

3.2 Fire Safety Plus

Following Full Council's decision to endorse significant investment in fire safety, housing has implemented the Fire Safety Plus programme. By 22 August, 71 residents had requested a check and appointments have been booked.

Some aspects of the programme can be delivered quickly (e.g. free plug adaptors) but some are more complex. This includes the retro fitting of sprinklers which will be designed on a block by block basis and differing systems may be needed for taller blocks in contrast to those below ten storeys. We have appointed C S Todd & Associates to assist in ensuring we have the best solution on every installation.

The safety of everyone living in each block is central to the Fire Safety Plus programme. It has been agreed that designated works from Fire Safety Plus will be provided to all residents, free of charge. Normally, the council would recharge leaseholders for a proportion of the cost of improvement works. A commitment has been made to an 'amnesty' period where the council will reinstate any unauthorised work free of charge, which may have compromised fire safety. This offer is to help make sure there is a higher level of fire integrity as possible. The amnesty offer is limited and once finished, anyone undertaking unauthorised works will be recharged accordingly.

There has been media interest in faulty electrical appliances resulting in serious fires. The Commissioner of the LFB has commented on the high frequency of calls the LFB receive in relation to this. Central to the Fire Safety Plus strategy is the electrical testing of white goods and if an appliance fails the test it will be replaced free of charge. This applies to all residents including leaseholders.

The Council has put a link to the Which? web site on the Council's website for all residents to check known defective tumble dryers against. This can be viewed at www.lbhf.gov.uk/checkyourappliance

3.3 Fire Risk Assessments

We have independent experts reviewing fire safety in all communal areas of blocks. Current standards don't require these assessments to check the outside of the building – cladding and external panels are not usually checked. So we have raised our standards in H&F and asked our expert fire reviewers to look at all external panelling.

Experts are also quality checking our own risk assessments for all sheltered schemes and blocks with 6 storeys plus and this will be completed by December 2017

3.4 Fire Safety Checks

In August 2017, housing staff completed safety checks on communal areas of every block and converted street properties. The process was based on good practice within the housing sector and staff were trained on how to apply the checklist consistently and uniformly. The check picks up common management issues that can be resolved quickly, for example, fire notices, damaged fire doors, items left in communal areas that can block fire exits.

The results of the checks will be published on the internet to offer reassurance to residents and residents can look up their block to see the safety check.

3.5 Working with the London Fire Brigade

The Fire Safety Strategy includes developing and maintaining a positive and proactive working relationship with the LFB. This involves the Borough Commander, fire safety regulation representatives and senior management

from Housing Services. Regular on-site meetings support this to demonstrate progression and to discuss alternative approaches. There is a lead contact within housing for any issues that the LFB require escalating.

The outcome of the above approach is a much clearer understanding of what the key issues are and how best to address these. It also has enabled our lead advisors, in particular CS Todd and Associates, to develop their recommendations in full consultation with the LFB at an early stage.

3.6 Management Actions

We have no council blocks that have cladding like that used on Grenfell Tower. We only have three tower blocks that have cladding. These blocks are on the Edward Woods estate and have 23 floors each. They are clad in Rockwool product. We have had both the materials used and the installation tested by independent experts BRE, and the Edward Woods estate passed these tests.

We have completed some fire safety work on the Edward Woods estate including altering the smoke alarm system, and removing panelling to the internal corridors on the top floors and extending the wet riser to the top floor.

Charecroft estate has four tower blocks each with 19 floors and these tower blocks have panels. We will be removing and replacing the window panels at Charecroft estate and we have round-the-clock fire patrols in all the Charecroft blocks to keep people safe while this work is being done.

Independent experts have also completed full checks on all other blocks with panels and where removal is recommended, this will form the basis of a future programme of works.

3.7 Compliance Management System

To ensure that all compliance actions from FRAs and safety checks are monitored a new compliance database (Geometra) was procured and commissioned. This went live in early August and enables FRA inspections to be collected in a uniform manner using a tablet device and once completed they can be uploaded to the database. Management and technical actions will be prioritised and assigned to individual officers to action. This will make sure a robust process control is in place as well as real time management reporting.

The database uses 'workflow' process by assigning tasks to individuals and setting a target date based on pre-agreed priorities. If the action remains outstanding near the target date, the system sends automated reminders as well as escalation to management.

3.8 Support to residents of Grenfell Tower

The council offered immediate support to the families placed within our borough following the Grenfell Tower fire. We've had up to 70 families placed

in 7 hotels across the borough and the numbers are currently remaining stable.

Officers from housing and adult social care regularly visit the hotels to meet and support the families. All families are provided with contact details should they need to reach officers at any time. We continue to provide restaurant vouchers, oyster cards top up, referral for emotional support and liaison with keyworkers.

Officers also supported by helping to organise donations that were collected at Hammersmith Town Hall.

3.9 How we communicate with Residents

Appended to this report is a detailed schedule of the communications issued by the council post Grenfell. The vast majority of these are resident focused and the emphasis was upon reassurance.

3.10 Approach to Continuous Improvement

A step change in approach to fire safety has occurred since March 2017 and critical to this is to make sure it is sustainable. Housing is planning to seek the externally accredited SP205 quality assurance standard. SP205 is an industry standard for organisations undertaking fire risk assessments. It sets out criteria and requirements for the competency of those carrying out the risk assessments, and the competency of those who review and sign off the reports before they are issued.

4.0 PROGRESS TO DATE, KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & ISSUES

The approach to fire safety management has contributed to:

- A substantial investment programme in Fire Safety Plus that looks at property condition, management approaches and resident involvement to achieve safe homes.
- An approach to fire safety in line with best practice.
- A risk based approach to delivering fire risk assessments, recognising complexity, and overall delivery of the entire programme.
- A reinvigorated and clear relationship with the LFB at several levels.
- A commitment to developing systems and procedures to ensure these fully support the prompt and effective delivery of a complex fire safety service to a diverse housing portfolio.
- An embedded continuous improvement regime with a view to formalising this and seeking external accreditation in due course.

4.2 Next Steps & Key Priorities

4.2.1 Three strategic priorities are:

- **Objective 1 – The timely delivery of Fire Safety Plus in consultation with residents**
- **Objective 2 – Fully embedding an externally accredited quality control process as it relates to fire safety**
- **Objective 3 – Signing off all recommended actions of the Internal Audit report (February 2017)**

6.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

No equality implications have been identified as part of the work on this report.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Leases will need to be checked to establish to whom the front entrance door is demised and whether there are any other legal implications arising under the terms and conditions of the lease.

Implications verified/completed by: Rhian Davies – Chief Solicitor

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No direct financial implications from this report, however, members should note that the expected costs of the Fire Safety Plus programme are between £20-50million.

Implications verified/completed by: Kath Corbett – Director of Housing Finance and Resources.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

There are no identified business implications because of the fire safety strategy.

APPENDICES

1. Fire safety plus booklet
2. Schedule of communications issued post Grenfell Tower fire

