

 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Housing Scrutiny Committee 27 July 2017</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director for Community Wellbeing</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Wards Affected: All</p>	
<p>Housing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017-18: Fire safety measures for tower blocks across Brent</p>	

1.0 Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the scrutiny objectives set out in the 2017-18 work programme in relation to Fire safety measures for tower blocks across Brent.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members note the measures already in place to ensure fire safety compliance and the further actions planned following the Council meeting on 10/07/2017.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Following the fatal fire at Grenfell Tower in June, the 2017-18 work programme was updated to include Fire safety measures for tower blocks across Brent. An update on measures being taken is provided below in relation to the 3 specific objectives:

4.0 **To assess the risk of any event similar to that of Grenfell Tower occurring particularly in social housing in Brent, and provide assurance if appropriate**

4.1 Fire Risk Assessment Programme

There are 37 Council-owned high-rise blocks of 6 storeys and over. All high-rise blocks have an annual Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) and all were assessed in March-May 2017. Following the fire at Grenfell Tower, all 29 high rise blocks managed by BHP were visited by the Estate Services team within 72 hours, to ensure the removal of all fire hazards such as waste items left in stairwells and shared hallways. The 2 Tenant Management Organisations were instructed to carry out the same checks on the 3 blocks at Watling Gardens and the 5 blocks

at Kilburn Square, which they did.

4.2 All recommendations in the FRAs are being implemented with a time scale of 31st October to complete all actions. Resources have been increased to deal with the remedial programme of safety works arising from the FRAs, this includes a dedicated fire safety team set up by Wates Living Space and the recruitment of 2 Fire Compliance Administrators and a Fire Safety Surveyor in BHP's Compliance & Risk team.

4.3 The Fire Risk Assessment used by BHP for Council stock is Type 1 – Common parts only (non-destructive), this is the basic fire risk assessment required for the purpose of statutory compliance. The inspection assesses arrangements for means of escape, examination of a sample of flat entrance doors and fire-proofing between the flats and the common parts of the building. There is no intrusive works to the fabric of the building and it does not check the interior of individual flats.

4.4 There are 3 other types of Fire Risk Assessment, these are not currently used for Brent Council stock:

Type 2 – Common parts only (destructive) this is Type 1 with some additional destructive inspection in the common parts, i.e. sections of the construction are opened up for inspection and sampling and made good afterwards.

Type 3 – Common parts and flats (non-destructive) this is Type with 1 with some additional checks in some of the flats to for means of escape and fire detection (e.g. smoke alarms) .

Type 4 – Common parts and flats (destructive) this is Type 1 with some destructive inspection, in both the common parts and some of the flats.

4.5 For information, an example Fire Risk Assessment is attached (Appendix 1). It should be noted that there are no confidentiality or data protection issues relating to this document as all high-rise FRAs were released in July in response to a Freedom of Information request and it is planned that all Fra documents will be made available to inquirers on the BHP website. The actions raised are mainly about responsive repair items, compliance checks on installations and staff training issues, a summary of all the actions is provided below:

- Check that the fixed wiring installation certificate is valid.
- Formulate a policy for use of personal electrical equipment in the workplace
- Implement control measures for keeping refuse collection rooms locked to reduce the risk of arson
- Ensure the boilers serving the block are serviced regularly and kept in good working order
- Ensure pram store areas has 2 door protection between the store area and the escape route
- Ensure current levels of stair ventilation is maintained when existing vents are replaced

- Replace a damaged flat door showing signs of forced entry
- Check that self-closing devices on flat entry doors are in place and in good working order
- Ensure control measures are in place to stop products of combustion spreading within the ductwork of the mechanical extract system
- Replace the shutter on the refuse chute with a fusible link
- Ensure measures are in place to control the hazards associated with multiple layers of paint accumulating on walls and ceilings
- Investigate through opening up or destructive works any insulation and fire stopping in the external rendering
- Train all staff in the use of fire extinguishers
- All staff frequenting the building to have fire safety awareness training

5.0 Fire Safety Improvement works

5.1 On 10th July the Council agreed for £10 million to be spent on a package of enhanced fire safety measures for high rise blocks such as sprinklers, smoke detectors and fire alarms. Council and BHP officers are currently developing a fully itemised and costed programme of fire safety work for Council consideration and approval by October 2017. At the 10/7/17 Council meeting, it was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Secretary of State asking the Government to meet this £10 million cost increase to the Council's 2017/2018 Capital Programme. (Appendix 2)

5.2 The specification being developed will outline the enhanced fire detection equipment that could be installed, over and above the required standard. In order to establish the exact works required, a suitably qualified specialist will carry out a survey of each building, and specify the schedule of works. This will be specific to each block, taking into account current arrangements for smoke alarms in common areas and individual homes, and also related site issues such as tower blocks with car parking facilities within the building. For each location the most suitable measures will be proposed and may include detection systems such as localised alarms in communal areas and/or dwellings, fire suppression systems such as sprinklers, or smoke extraction systems. The appropriate procurement framework will be used in order to appoint the relevant specialists required in order to complete this preparatory work. The detailed plan which will be brought back for consideration by Council in October 2017.

6.0 Smoke Detectors

6.1 All tenanted properties were fitted with smoke detectors as part of the Decent Homes programme. Tenants are asked to check regularly that the detectors are working and to report any faults to BHP so that repairs can be carried out. An annual test is also carried out by a BHP contractor as part of the annual gas appliance check.

7.0 Improved awareness of the mitigation measures in place for civil emergencies

7.1 Mitigation

Brent maintains a 24 hour duty officer rota to receive notification of major incidents including large scale fires that require the evacuation of homes. This is supported by a team of trained Local Authority Liaison Officers who can be deployed in an emergency and who are trained in operating a Rest Centre for displaced residents. As part of the Council's Civic Contingencies planning, a risk register of Civil Emergencies is maintained.

7.2 The Chief Executive is reviewing our emergency planning and is convening a group of 8 councilors from scrutiny panels and the audit committee to consider the plans in detail. They will come back through the Audit and Scrutiny Committees in the autumn with any recommendations going to Cabinet for approval.

8.0 Awareness

8.1 Fire in a tower block is an identified risk on the Brent risk register and is assessed and discussed locally each year by the Borough Resilience Forum (BRF), a statutory body of Category 1 and 2 responders that meet to discuss local resilience issues. The BRF in Brent meets quarterly and is a platform to enhance multi-agency understanding of each other's roles, to look at local resilience issues and collaborate across the member organisations. There is a sub-regional and regional structure enabling lessons learned and emerging issues to be shared and for guidance and information to be distributed. Members of the BRF in Brent include Brent Council's Emergency Planning team, Metropolitan Police, NHS England, London Ambulance, London Fire Brigade, British Transport Police, Military, Public Health England, Environment Agency and British Red Cross. Other responders such as utilities, telecoms, and transport operators also contribute but are not represented at every meeting.

8.2 The lead organization on the Borough Resilience forum is the London Fire Brigade. The risk of fire in a tower block was last reviewed in July 2017 and the assessment will be presented to the full Borough Resilience Forum for approval in August. This will include a discussion of the risk that will increase awareness amongst the responding agencies. The Borough Resilience forum discusses as a standing item incidents and responses and the August meeting of the forum will be an opportunity to further raise awareness of issues relating to fire safety in response to the incident at Grenfell Tower.

9.0 Responding to Wider Public Interest

9.1 Information to residents

To deal with the increased level of inquiries, a dedicated email address fire.safety@bhphousing.co.uk has been set up, this has received over 100 external inquiries about fire safety issues in the last month. To provide an alternative means of contact a dedicated phone line 020 8937 2486 has been set up in the

last week. Both the email address and the phone line are being advertised to residents to enable them to request fire related repairs, report issues and ask for information. A letter has been sent to all residents to promote the dedicated contact points and to share information and advice through Frequently Asked Questions. The letter also reminds all residents of the need to keep stairwells, corridors and other exit routes clear of all obstructions including bicycles and buggies, and informs residents that any items that are obstructing escape routes will be removed without notice. (Appendix 3)

10.0 Local meetings

- 10.1 Council and BHP officers have attended meetings in Wembley, Watling Gardens and South Kilburn with the 3 local MPs together with Fire Brigade representatives to provide information to residents and deal with any fire safety concerns they may have. A programme of local drop-ins will be held in July-October, these will be advertised to all high-rise residents and will be held in locations convenient for the 37 high rise blocks. The sessions are intended as informal drop-ins where residents can raise individual concerns with the Fire Brigade and with Fire Safety, Estate Inspection and Housing Management staff from BHP, and will also be an opportunity for BHP to share information on the Fire Risk Assessment programme, building inspection frequencies for safety and cleaning checks, and to re-inforce the message about keeping common areas clear from all obstructions so they are safe if an emergency evacuation is needed.

11.0 Press and Freedom of Information Inquiries

- 11.1 Since the Grenfell Tower incident, 12 fire-related Freedom of Information inquiries have been received, compared to 2 inquiries on fire safety and expenditure in the whole year 2016-17. The Freedom of Information total includes several press inquiries that are being dealt with as information requests in response to the high volume of press inquiries. Many of the inquiries are requesting detailed information about the number of Council high rise blocks, the Fire Risk Assessment programme and copies of the risk assessment documents. It is likely that the level of inquiries from the press and the public will continue for some time. To assist with responses to external inquiries, the Council's website will be used where appropriate to publicise information and fire safety compliance and frequently asked questions, so that inquirers can be referred to information that is already publicly available. As stated above this will include publication of all Fire Risk Assessments.

12.0 Financial implications

- 12.1 If the Council's request for government financial support is rejected, further consideration will need to be given to how this will be funded, with a detailed funding plan to be brought to Cabinet in October 2017, along with the detailed programme of works.

13.0 Legal implications

- 13.1 Owners and landlords of buildings have to comply with various legal obligations to ensure the safety of others and to discharge the duty of care they owe. The fire safety works outlined in this report include safeguards over and above minimum statutory requirements.
- 13.2 The procurement and contract issues arising will be reported at the same time as the detailed and costed programme of works.

14.0 Equality implications

- 14.1 There are no direct equality implications in relation to this report.

15.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 15.1 here are no direct staffing or accommodation implications in relation to this report.

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Example Fire Risk Assessment

Appendix 2 – Letter to Secretary of State

Appendix 3 – Letter and Frequently Asked Questions sent to Brent Council tenants and leaseholders

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