



Housing Scrutiny Committee 16 January 2018

Report from the Strategic Director of Performance Policy & Partnerships

Task group report on fire safety of low-rise domestic properties

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report set out the findings and recommendations of the recent task group into Fire Safety of Low-Rise Domestic Properties.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Housing Scrutiny Committee is recommended to endorse the report at Appendix 1 and the recommendations contained therein.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Following the fatal fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 there has been significant focus by different levels of government on the fire safety of domestic properties across the country. Nationally, this includes the Department for Communities and Local Government's Building Safety Programme, a public inquiry into the circumstances of the fire, and the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety. In Brent, the council has published its fire risk assessments (FRAs) for council properties, and updated the 2017-18 housing works programme to include fire safety measures for tower blocks. The council has further agreed for £10 million to be spent on a package of enhanced fire safety measures for high rise blocks, and undertaken a number of other measures.

- 3.2 However, the majority of fire events occur in low rise properties, and so the task group felt there was a compelling case to investigate fire safety measures for these in addition to high rise blocks. It set out to examine fire safety measures for council housing and social housing managed by registered providers (RPs), as well as how they communicate with their tenants and leaseholders in respect of these issues. The group also looked at housing allocations policy, the risks posed by bulky items in common areas, and emergency vehicle access for social housing estates.
- 3.3 Social landlords have completed FRAs for all high rise blocks (18m and above) apart from street properties. The council has published its assessments online, and the RPs who met the group had mostly completed their FRAs, with the remaining few to be completed by March 2018. However, this is inconsistent amongst landlords and amongst types of property. The task group believes that all residents should benefit from the information and reassurance provided by making these assessments publicly available.
- 3.4 Evidence considered by the task group indicates that licensing for landlords has raised safety standards, and it concluded that it is of the greatest importance that the council does everything it can to raise awareness of landlords' obligations under this scheme amongst tenants.
- 3.5 A personal emergency plan exists for each vulnerable person, and the local fire brigade is provided notification of their location and vulnerability. The task group felt that it was important for this information to be regularly updated.
- 3.6 Bulky items stored in communal areas can pose a fire risk, or an obstruction to escape in the event of a fire. However, the task group was concerned that some landlords may not be proactive in their attitudes towards clearing these. It also recognised that storage space is an important factor in this regard, particularly for vulnerable residents who may rely on bulky equipment.
- 3.7 The issue of illegal parking in locations meant for the use of emergency vehicles was identified by members as an important area of focus. The necessary markings and signage to prohibit parking in these locations are often incomplete or unclear, and require immediate attention from the council and RPs to ensure high standards in safety for all Brent residents. Current parking enforcement also has limitations. Data reviewed by the task group demonstrates that better communication is required to inform residents where they should not park, and stronger policies and practice to deter them from doing so - particularly when this can impede the emergency services.
- 3.8 The task group also found anecdotal evidence that levels of awareness of basic fire safety are far from where they should be, and this remains a continuous challenge which requires further effort to address.
- 3.9 The task group has made 11 recommendations, shown below.

Recommendation 1: The council and registered providers in Brent should publish the latest Fire Risk Assessments for all of their properties on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 2: In wards where the landlord licensing scheme is in force, the council should continue work to raise tenants' awareness of it (and more widely if it is expanded beyond these wards). It should also publish a "plain English" guide for tenants on landlords' obligations under the scheme.

Recommendation 3: The council should better publicise the existing systems for residents to anonymously report non-compliant landlords under the landlord licence scheme.

Recommendation 4: The council and registered providers should work with care providers to ensure that the London Fire Brigade has up-to-date information about vulnerable tenants and leaseholders.

Recommendation 5: The council and registered providers should review the appropriateness of fire detection systems in properties based on the specific needs of their tenants and leaseholders.

Recommendation 6: All landlords should take a "zero tolerance" approach to bulky items kept in common areas.

Recommendation 7: All social landlords should provide storage space for bulky items for all property types and sizes.

Recommendation 8: The council should continue to develop plans and seek funding for secure bicycle storage units across the borough.

Recommendation 9: The council and registered providers should act to reduce unauthorised parking in areas for the use of emergency services, including:

- clearer and better maintained signage and markings to identify those areas permitted for car parking, and all those areas which are to be kept clear
- improving awareness of traffic and parking rules, and
- stronger enforcement of parking rules.

Recommendation 10: The council and registered providers should regularly use their communication channels to inform and raise the awareness of residents in relation to fire safety.

Recommendation 11: The council and registered providers should provide, in the main entrance of all types of property, floor plans identifying the location of fire exits, and clearly and simply explaining what to do in case of a fire.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 There are no equality implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 7.1 The task group was made up of members of the committee and others. The consultation and views obtained throughout the group's work are detailed in the report.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications

- 8.1 There are no human resources or property implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon

Director of Performance Policy &
Partnerships