

Report of Simon Kwong, Service Director, Housing Property Services

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s):
Housing Scrutiny Committee	12 September 2019	All

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt


SUBJECT: Housing Fire Safety Update – overview on progress
1 Oversight of the council’s fire safety landlord responsibilities and keeping in touch with the latest developments

- 1.1 The council follows all fire safety guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing Communities Local Government (MHCLG) and London Fire Brigade. The council has reviewed all its cladding systems and risk assessed all buildings to ensure we are following requirements and responding to any issues that arise.
- 1.2 Once any changes to requirements become clear as a result of the Hackitt Review, a working group will be established to look at the implications for council homes and how the council will fulfil its amended duties.
- 1.3 The following reviews have been undertaken because of the risks exposed by the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower:
 1. ACM – the council immediately identified high rise blocks where ACM cladding could not be ruled out and sent panels for testing which shared similar qualities to ACM cladding, confirming this cladding on just one of the three possible sites.
 2. Sprinklers – although there was no change in regulation, the council proactively estimated the cost of retrofitting sprinklers in high risk blocks

and considered the potential risks, costs and issues so that we are prepared for any changes in legislation.

3. Insulation systems on tall buildings were reviewed and where insulation was identified as not complying with building regulations (one building, Fyfield on the Six Acres estate), swift action to remediate this has been taken.

1.4 The council monitors fire safety guidance and regulation for tall buildings through the following meetings:

- London Councils Housing Directors fire safety meetings (quarterly) – a group of Housing Directors from councils across London
- Tall buildings fire safety meetings (every 2 months) – representatives across the council chaired by Simon Kwong, Service Director, Housing Property Services – the group oversees both the council’s duty as landlord and its regulatory functions for safety in housing in the borough in relation to tall buildings
- Homes and Estates Safety Board (quarterly) – our independently chaired Partnership Board, including the London Fire Brigade
- London Fire Brigade (LFB) liaison meetings (quarterly) - we work closely with the LFB to take advice and guidance
- The Adult Safeguarding Board has considered the issue of evacuation of vulnerable residents in the event of a fire

2. Delivering our fire safety responsibilities

2.1 *Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs)*

2.2 There are 127 council-owned residential buildings of 6 storeys or more in Islington, including 49 buildings of 10 storeys or more. The council decided in the aftermath of the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower to undertake FRAs of all our tall buildings annually, in excess of the 3 yearly requirement.

2.3 FRA records are updated whenever an action is completed or something changes to affect the risk rating. If any intolerable or substantial risks are identified, the FRA is reviewed within three months to ensure urgent actions are undertaken.

2.4 FRAs for all 127 blocks of 6 storeys or more are published on the council’s website.

3. Resolutions of identified significant fire safety issues

3.1 *Braithwaite House – ACM Cladding*

This was the only council-owned residential tall building that had ACM cladding panels (on its two end walls). The ACM cladding was removed by 24 August 2017, ten weeks after the Grenfell fire. Replacement cladding works were

completed in May 19. We have received 80% of the funding from MHCLG, the remaining 20% has been applied for now that works have been completed.

3.2 *Fyfield - Insulation*

Issues were identified with the external wall insulation on this block through our insulation systems review. It emerged that the insulation system used (expanded polystyrene or EPS) was not suitable for a tall block and therefore the insulation was removed. A new cladding system with rock wool insulation is being installed in its place. A contractor has been appointed and timescales have been agreed. We have also undertaken internal works to improve the compartmentation within and between the flats. A 24-hour waking watch was in place whilst the insulation was removed and the compartmentation works were done to ensure residents' safety.

3.3 *Fire stopping works - Spa Green*

Issues were highlighted by the Spa Green Management Organisation with the deterioration of the fire stopping measures installed during heating works over 10 years ago. The council's appointed contractor has now agreed a programme of works in each of the three affected blocks and contract terms and conditions are in the process of being agreed. A programme timetable will be established at the completion of the pilot phase.

3.4 *Installation of wet risers*

Michael Cliffe House had a wet rising main installed in 2018. The installation of a wet rising main at Peregrine House was recently completed, in July 2019.

4. Estate Management - communal areas

4.1 Having clear and safe communal areas is vital to reducing the risk of fire and maintaining the safety of residents in our blocks should a fire occur. Applying this policy reduces fire loading and potential fuels for a fire in the first place, as well as ensuring that fire fighters are not delayed in reaching a property during a fire. This keeps all residents safe and is even more important in those council buildings (street properties and some older-style mansion blocks) where a 'leave in the event of a fire in the building' strategy is in place. The policy is simple for residents to follow and estate staff to enforce and appears to be working well with enforcement action being taken if removal clearance cannot be gained from the responsible resident.

4.2 The council's Estate Services Team and Partners are seeking to improve access to street properties to carry out vital safety checks. Both teams are working to ensure they hold keys to communal areas within street properties, this will help keep residents safer in their homes. These properties are more vulnerable to inappropriate storage in communal areas because they do not receive a caretaking service and also require resident evacuation in the event of a fire.

5. Working together to keep residents safe

5.1 *Keeping communal areas clear (including storage solutions)*

Inappropriate storage of belongings can compromise the safety of all residents, however as a landlord the council recognises the challenges residents experience in being able to store items, especially with so many of our residents having to live in overcrowded conditions. During 2018/19 Homes and Communities developed the following initiatives to increase resident opportunities for storage.

5.2 *Secure cycle storage*

It is important as a landlord and as a council supporting green travel that there is plenty of cycle storage in place. Last year we delivered the following additional cycle storage:

- 16 more bike hangars were provided on estates, holding a total of 98 cycles.
- Converted garages for cycle storage, each holding 10 cycles.
- 35 more estate visitor cycle stands
- Opportunities for storing cycles safely and affordably are continuously marketed to residents.

In total there are now 82 estate cycle storage facilities, holding a total of 1092 cycles across 55 estates and 393 estate visitor cycle stands across 53 estates. This supports residents and visitors to keep estates safe by keeping communal areas free. Funding is committed to add more estate resident cycle storage across five wards.

5.3 *Storage of belongings*

The council is helping residents to access storage for their belongings through:

- Converting nine garages into 27 storage sheds, with integral shelving.
- Upgrading three existing sheds within garage areas. This supports residents in de-cluttering their homes and communal hallways. We advertise these facilities to overcrowded households nearby.
- Making the most of estate facilities by bringing 174 external pram storage sheds back into use.

5.4 *Partnership working*

The council is working with Partners for Improvement in Islington to help identify storage solutions for council street property residents, through the facilities available on nearby estates. We are also working with housing associations to collate data on their cycle storage facilities and encouraging them to take on good practice.

6 Keeping our most vulnerable residents are safe

- 6.1 The council holds details of vulnerabilities experienced by over 550 households living in council homes. There is a wide variety of vulnerabilities.
- 6.2 This information is available to share with our partners in the London Fire Brigade (LFB) in the event of an emergency, if it becomes useful to them as part of their response. The council has arrangements in place for a Housing Incident Manager to be available in the event of an emergency, outside of working hours, to assist with emergency incidents, such as severe fires or floods on estates. This arrangement with LFB is long-standing and the council has shared information about vulnerable residents with LFB when past emergencies have occurred in Islington.
- 6.3 Discussions with our local LFB have identified that the key information that would assist them in the event of an emergency relates to residents with mobility impairments that may hinder self-evacuation, in the unlikely event this becomes necessary. Please note not all of the 550+ residents who have reported vulnerabilities have mobility impairments.
- 6.4 We promote, publicise and make referrals where appropriate for LFB home fire safety visits to vulnerable residents. For example, the council and LFB recently held a joint session with the Housing Disability Panel about fire safety where these were promoted to concerned residents, a number of whom took up this offer as a result of the meeting.
- 6.5 The council's Construction and Fire Safety Team with the LFB are currently working on a pilot to trial the provision of data on resident mobility within a Premises Information Box (PIB) to look at how useful this type of information would be to LFB in practice and how to keep this secure and up to date. PIBs have been fitted to four of our tall blocks: Braithwaite House, Perth House, Selkirk House and Fyfield. A priority system has been devised in conjunction with LFB, building on information provided by residents through a questionnaire to identify residents with mobility problems, the support they have at home and seeking their permission to share this information with the LFB. The Housing Disability Panel has recently been consulted for their feedback on the approach we are taking and to gain their suggestions for any improvements. We will review the pilot with LFB and consider the benefits of further roll out.

7 Communications with residents

- 7.1 Fire safety advice and reassurance has been provided to residents through the following communications:
- 7.2 *Resident communication - advice in the event of a fire*
Letters were sent to all tenants and leaseholders (incl. non-resident leaseholders, who have a responsibility for keeping their tenants

informed) reiterating the fire safety instructions for their building: stay put or leave. These letters enclosed a copy of the LFB fire safety instructions for their property.

7.3 *Clean and clear letters and leaflets – issued where communal areas are being used by residents for storage*

Residents receive first and second stage letters asking them to move their belongings if they are in breach of the council's safety policy. Partners are using similar letters for their residents explaining the risk associated with storage in communal areas, related to escape and spread of fire.

New leaflets about keeping communal areas clean and clear have been produced, for officers to leave behind when they visit peoples' homes.

7.4 *Electronic Noticeboards*

Fire safety messages have been regularly posted on electronic noticeboards since 5 July 2017.

7.5 *Islington Life magazine summer 2017*

Issue contained an update from Paul Hobbs, the LFB Borough Commander for Islington at the time, that included advice to residents living in high rise blocks and details on how to book a free home fire safety visit by the LFB. The issue also covered a reassuring message to residents about some of the immediate actions taken by the council following Grenfell, and informing them about the regular inspections and fire risk assessments that are undertaken to ensure fire safety measures are in good working order and communal areas are clean and clear. Advice on Hotpoint Fridge freezers was also included in the update, with contact details for registering for more details and updates.

7.6 *Islington Life magazine summer 2018 and winter 2018*

Message for residents about BBQ's not being allowed on balconies was included in the summer edition 2018 and again in 2019. There was a message about being careful with candles included in the winter edition 2018, and this will be repeated again in the winter 2019 edition.

7.7 *Revised fire safety notices*

Plain English fire safety notices which meet national standards and have been approved by LFB have been produced for all blocks ahead of an installation programme which is currently being finalised.

Fire safety web pages and dedicated fire safety email address

The council's fire safety pages were updated following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower. They are now being refreshed by the Communications team. We have a dedicated fire safety email address, which was heavily used by concerned residents following the fire at Grenfell Tower.

Fire safety media updates

Since June 2017 the council has responded to at least 100 media inquiries about fire safety. These have come from local media (e.g. Islington Gazette, Islington

Tribune), London media (e.g. BBC London, Evening Standard), national media (e.g. Guardian, The Sun), trade media (e.g. Inside Housing) and international media (Huffington Post). These responses include explaining the council’s action to remove unsafe cladding from Braithwaite House in 2017, action to remove insulation from Fyfield in 2018, and individual questions on issues ranging from fire door safety to evacuation plans.

8. How we are investing in improving fire safety

8.1 Value of the council’s investment in fire safety measures

The council has budgeted £74m to spend on fire safety works over the next five years. The below table provides a breakdown of planned works and cost:

Fire safety works to tall blocks	£20m
Interlinked fire alarms and emergency lighting works in street properties and mansion blocks	£14m
Installation of wet rising mains	£4m
Communal doors and bin storage areas	£24m
Front door programme	£11m
Electrical testing programme	£5m
Total	£78m

8.2 To date £16.7m has been spent of the £78m budget, including works to convert dry rising mains to wet rising mains in Peregrine House and Michael Cliffe House. Fire compartmentation works will be included where necessary within the £20m for tall blocks (but is already undertaken as part of the overall cyclical improvement programme).

8.3 Interlinked fire detection programme for street properties and older mansion blocks

The council’s street properties and some older mansion blocks were found to require the installation of radio interlinked communal early warning fire detection systems and emergency lighting. In order to install these, some street properties will also need to have a landlord electricity supply installed where not already present.

8.4 We are currently working with the appointed contractors to ensure that designated pilots are successfully signed off as being compliant by our Building Control Services Team before rolling out the main programme of works, which will commence in September 2019, finishing in September 2022.

8.5 A majority of the street properties are currently managed by Partners for Improvement in Islington, therefore bi-monthly progress meetings are held with them to discuss operational matters.

8.6 Front entrance door and communal doors programmes

The council has a programme to upgrade and replace front entrance doors where they do not meet the recommended fire safety standards. The upgrade of existing doors with closers continues, however Islington Council alongside many other social landlords have paused their door replacement programme because of concerns raised as a result of the MHCLG door testing programme, which failed to pass any of the composite doors tested. Many landlords have used these doors as they were certificated to have met the required standards. MHCLG have now completed a testing programme of timber doors and have found that a range of these meet the FD30S standard. We are therefore currently investigating the appointment of a contractor to fit recently-tested and compliant timber front entrance doors on a programmed basis.

9. The council's work with other landlords

9.1 The council have responsibility for monitoring other social and private sector housing tall buildings and report to central government on this. The council oversee that landlords identify safety issues and ensure they are taking action to remediate issues where required, keeping up to date with progress.

9.2 Cladding, other issues in tall blocks over 18 meters – housing associations and private sector homes

9.3 *The Guinness Partnership block 1*

This is a Guinness Partnership residential block above the Bridge School. The building was found to have been clad with ACM cladding following testing. The Guinness Partnership have put in place additional safety measures for this block, agreed with the LFB, ahead of remedial works. The council is the freeholder of the building but we have a long lease with The Guinness Partnership who act as landlord to the residents of the accommodation. The council has tendered the remediation works and has appointed Engie to carry out the replacement of the cladding system. The Guinness Partnership as long leaseholder of the housing are contributing towards the cost of works.

9.4 *The Guinness Partnership block 2 including Council leased Community Centre*

This is a Guinness Partnership residential block with a community centre below which is leased to the council under a long lease. The block was found to have ACM cladding as part of the MHCLG cladding testing programme. The building has been emptied and handed over to the contractor appointed by the Guinness Partnership. Survey works have commenced so that the order for replacement cladding can be placed.

9.5 *Notting Hill Genesis*

This is a privately owned building, with a medical research facility on the ground floor and residential units above which are owned on a long lease by Notting Hill Genesis. Notting Hill Genesis have applied for government funding for the

remediation work to be carried out to the whole building and are providing progress updates to the council.

9.6 *Student accommodation blocks*

These are two student accommodation buildings and have interim measures in place following the identification of ACM cladding on these blocks. Both universities are in negotiation with the developer about funding for the works.

9.7 Insulation

9.8 *Peabody – blocks 1 and 2*

Peabody Housing Association identified that the insulation system on this building did not meet the required standards and agreed additional safety measures with the LFB until the insulation could be removed. Works are in progress to replace the polystyrene insulation with non-flammable rock wool insulation. Works are due to complete in December 2019 with the replacement of the render. A waking watch has been stood down following a review of fire safety and the buildings have reverted a stay put fire safety policy.

9.9 *Peabody – block 3 and 4*

These two buildings have the same issue with the insulation as above. Peabody have removed the insulation from the buildings and are waiting for the outcome of the Planning application submitted before they can proceed with the works. Both blocks have reverted to a stay put fire safety policy following a review of fire safety.

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