

Committees:	Dates:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	23/03/2020
Subject: Fire Safety Update – HRA Properties	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress that has been made in relation to fire safety matters since the last update report submitted to Committee in September 2019.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note, consider and comment on the report.

Main Report

Background

1. In July 2017, an initial detailed report was presented to the Community & Children's Services Committee, the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee and the Audit and Risk Management Committee updating Members on the City of London Corporation's (CoLC) approach to fire safety in its social housing portfolio. This report informed Members of the progress we had made with matters such as:
 - fire risk assessments,
 - communication with residents,
 - estate management,
 - fire safety maintenance and improvement work,
 - inspections by the London Fire Brigade (LFB),
 - potential future improvement works.
2. Further update and review reports have been brought back to this Committee and the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee on several occasions to inform Members of the work that has been done to enhance the safety of the CoLC's social housing estates and its residents in the event of fire.
3. This report is intended as a further update.

Considerations

Automatic Water Fire Suppression Systems (Sprinklers)

4. At its meeting on 11 May 2018, Members of the Community & Children's Services Committee agreed a recommendation from its Director to retrofit automatic water suppression systems in each of its five social housing high-rise tower blocks below:
 - Great Arthur House, Golden Lane;
 - Petticoat Tower, Middlesex Street;
 - West Point, Avondale Estate;
 - Central Point, Avondale Estate;
 - East Point, Avondale Estate.
5. Discussions have been held with colleagues in the CoLC's Planning and Building Control Teams in relation to Great Arthur House, which Members agreed was the priority as a result of the complex compartmentation issues. A Gateway 1-4 report, which was approved by this Committee on 2 November 2018 and Projects Sub Committee on 7 November 2018, agreed:
 - A total project cost of £3,200,000 including design, project management and staff costs;
 - Survey, planning, design and tender costs of £75,000 to get to the next stage of the Gateway process (Gateway 5);
 - That a compliant procurement exercise be undertaken for the installation of sprinklers in our five social housing high-rise tower blocks;
 - That Committee approval be sought at Gateway 5 for the appointment of a contractor to carry out the installation works.
6. Following the completion and production of the Employer's Requirements, a competitive procurement exercise was undertaken and, Butler & Young Associates was appointed to carry out an initial design and structural assessment for the retrofitting of a sprinkler system in the five high-rise tower blocks.
7. Butler & Young has recently completed and submitted its initial report, the purpose of which, in the main, was to obtain input from its Structural Engineer (PGCS), its Fire Engineers (Ashton Fire), the CoLC's Corporate Fire Safety Advisor and the LFB in order to achieve a definitive formal structural assessment of the proposed sprinkler installation and the overall fire safety observations for each of the high-rise tower blocks.
8. The initial report has concluded that retrofit sprinkler systems can be installed in all five blocks without the need for major structural works. However, the project is complex particularly, in relation to the likely need for external plant rooms at on the Avondale Estate.
9. The next stage in the process is to establish the design fee requirements based on the initial report submitted by Butler & Young. This will be concluded by the end of March after which, a decision can be taken on the appointment of a specialist Design Consultant to finalise the specification and tender documentation.

10. Whilst it is still possible that the project could be completed by the end of March 2021, as previously reported, it will be challenging not only because of the complexity of the project but also, due to the demands on the industry and the shortage of suitable contractors. A more detailed and definitive programme for the project will be agreed once the Design Consultant is appointed.

Fire Doors

11. As Members will be aware from previous reports, random sample testing of several front entrance doors to individual flats in our residential blocks has been carried out. This destructive testing indicated an average fire resistance of 16 minutes. We have carried out further destructive testing to front entrance doors on other estates and, some of the results have been considerably below the previous average fire resistance of 16 minutes.
12. As a result of the further testing that has been carried out, officers have carried out a more detailed and comprehensive survey of front entrance doors to all 63 blocks of flats. We have subsequently reviewed and revised the programme and delivery schedule for the main Door Replacement Programme.
13. The CoLC is committed to replacing all front entrance doors in its residential blocks of flats with fire doors that give up to 60 minutes fire resistance (30 minutes as an absolute minimum). The estimated cost of this programme is in the region of £9million.
14. We have been working closely with GERDA Security Products Limited, a specialist door manufacturer, to develop a prototype replacement doorset that has been rigorously tested to provide 60 minutes fire resistance and has passed appropriate door smoke tightness tests. The prototype door set has been fitted in one of our homes in Petticoat Tower, Middlesex Street and it has been very well received.
15. We are currently working with our colleagues in City Procurement to find a suitable expedient route to market that will allow us to reduce the timescale for the completion of the overall programme. A suitable specialist framework has been identified (the Hyde Framework) that will allow us to proceed swiftly using GERDA as our preferred supplier. However, due to the extent and scale of this project, Member support will be needed to allow us to proceed along this route.

Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs)

16. As Members will be aware, Frankham Risk Management Services Limited completed FRAs for each of our residential blocks of flats in October/November 2017 and, as agreed by Members, these were published on the CoLC's website in June 2018.
17. At its meeting on 5 June 2018, Members were first presented with the 'Specific Hazard Identification and Action Plan Template for Fire Risk Assessments', which lists the recommendations from all the FRA's on our residential blocks. Officers continue to work on the various recommendations contained within the Action Plan

and good progress is being made. An updated version of the Action Plan is included at Appendix 1 to this report.

18. Carrying out FRA's under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO), is a vital and legally required part of the CoLC's fire safety strategy for its residential portfolio. The RRO does not specify how often FRA's should be carried out or reviewed. However, the Local Government Association (LGA) has published guidance on fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats, which recommends the following procedure for FRA's:

Low-rise blocks up to 3-storeys built in the last 20 years

- reviewed every 2 years;
- redone every 4 years.

For blocks with higher risks (such as age), or those more than 3-storeys high

- reviewed every year;
- redone every 3 years.

19. Up until recently, the FRA's for the CoLC's housing stock have been done annually for the last 3 years. The FRA's from October/November 2017 have again been reviewed and mandated in line with the Corporation's auditing procedures for FRA's.
20. Clearly, simply carrying out FRA's is worthless if they are not updated regularly and the improvement work identified is not undertaken. As Members will be appreciate, a considerable amount of fire safety work has been done, is being done and is scheduled to be done to bring our housing stock up to the required standard. It will, however, take time.
21. There is no requirement for, or value in, commissioning further FRA's this year and the focus will be on continuing the progress we are making on the improvements identified in the Action Plan appended to this report. However, it is intended that new Type 3 FRA's will be procured and carried out for each of our residential blocks of flats on our social housing estates early in 2021.
22. As can be seen from the Action Plan at Appendix 1, initial surveys have been carried out on those areas identified by the previously completed Type 3 FRA's as requiring further investigation. Whilst these surveys have shown that some of the concerns raised are not of concern, further detailed surveys and works are required in some blocks to deal with issues around compartmentation. As shown in the Action Plan, this specific area of work is in progress and will be completed by the end of December this year.

Great Arthur House

23. As Members have been advised previously, due to the unique nature of the building and its issues, Great Arthur House is being dealt with as a 'special project' in terms of the fire safety works.

24. In March this year, we undertook the installation of a temporary door set at one property in Great Arthur House so that, the original door set could be removed and sent away for destructive testing to assess its level of fire and smoke resistance. The notional expectation for a door set of this type and age, is 15 to 20 minutes fire resistance however, in this instance, the door set failed in less than five minutes.
25. As a result of concerns with the level of compartmentation in Great Arthur House, we have carried out a series of precautionary improvement works including:
- the installation of a permanent hard-wired fire alarm system to the whole of the building;
 - the delivery, and installation where required, of individual smoke detectors to all flats in Great Arthur House;
 - the completion of a detailed 'fire safety signage survey' and subsequent upgrading of all fire safety signage to reflect the new evacuation arrangements and to pick up the deficiencies noted in the FRA's, to ensure, that the signage in the block is accurate, up-to-date and compliant;
 - the introduction of an evacuation process for residents in the event of a fire.
26. A Gateway 3/4 Options Appraisal report was considered and agreed by the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee at its meeting on 16 September last year, for the procurement and appointment of a specialist Design Team and fire engineering consultant to carry out the necessary preparatory works to progress the project to Gateway 5.
27. A procurement exercise for the appointment of the Design Team has been completed and, the evaluation of tenders is also complete. Contracts should be exchanged by mid-March to allow the Design Team to commence its work. The role of the Design Team includes the appointment of a Fire Safety Consultant to assist with compliance in relation to the doors and, in relation to the associated compartmentation issues. The next stages will include the development of interim designs and planning approval for the temporary replacements whilst, we undertake further destructive testing of area that have not, as yet been tested.

London Fire Brigade (LFB)

28. At the time of the last update report in September 2019, it was reported that the LFB was carrying out more frequent ad-hoc inspections on residential flat blocks across the City to ensure that they comply with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and to ensure that appropriate FRAs are being carried out.
29. In October last year, the LFB carried out an unannounced formal inspection at block 1-87 Longland Court on the Avondale Estate. During the inspection, it was noted that some fire safety matters required attention to reduce the risk of fire and/or reasonably ensure the safety of people using the premises. These matters were outlined in a 'Notification of Fire Safety Deficiencies' notice dated 11 October 2019.

30. In the main, the deficiencies noted related to the following matters:

- general issues relating to 'unsuitable storage' where, residents had left items such as children's toys and bicycles in communal areas potentially, hindering means of escape;
- ambiguity with some of the fire action notices installed throughout the protected staircases;
- repairs to the self-closers to the communal fire doors;
- front entrance doors to the flats do not conform to the current fire resistance standard.

31. Except for the front entrance doors to the flats, the deficiencies highlighted by the inspection were dealt with swiftly and efficiently. Further discussion has been had with the LFB reiterating our commitment to replacing front entrance doors to all our flats over the next 18 months to two years. The LFB has also been advised that the Avondale Estate will be prioritised.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fire Safety Action Plan

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