

Agenda Item 5

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| Committee(s): Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee – For Decision | Dated: 17 April 2024 |
| Subject: Fire Safety Update – HRA Properties | Public |
| Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly? | 1, 2, 4, 12 |
| Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending? | N |
| If so, how much? | N/A |
| What is the source of Funding? | |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department? | N/A |
| Report of Judith Finlay Executive Director of Community & Children’s Services | For Information |
| Report author: Pam Wharfe Assistant Director, Housing and Barbican Department of Community & Children’s Services | |

Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of this Committee with information on how the City of London Corporation (the Corporation), through its Housing Property Services Team, is ensuring that its homes on its twelve social housing estates are managed in a way that meets compliance with current health and safety legislation, best practice, and regulatory standards relating to fire safety.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. 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 Corporation’s 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 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 Corporation'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. Members of the Community & Children's Services Committee have previously 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 Estate;
 - Petticoat Tower, Middlesex Street Estate;
 - West Point, Avondale Square Estate;
 - Centre Point, Avondale Square Estate;
 - East Point, Avondale Square Estate.
5. Following completion of a compliant, competitive tendering exercise, United Living was appointed to carry out the installation of automatic water suppression systems in each of the Corporation's five social housing high-rise tower blocks. However, due to escalating costs and potential time delays, Great Arthur House and Petticoat Tower were subsequently removed from the contract with United Living.
6. Although the retrofitting of sprinklers is a complex and challenging project, we are making good progress with the works as set out below.

West Point, Centre Point and East Point – Avondale Square Estate

The contractor, United Living are progressing well across the three Avondale Square Point Blocks, with completion now expected by the end of May 2024. Of the 222 properties in the three blocks, four leaseholders have not yet provided access, two tenants have refused access (legal proceedings have commenced) and two tenants require further assistance.

Despite the intrusive nature of the works, resident satisfaction, gauged from ours and the contractor's in-house surveys has been largely positive, with no "very dissatisfied" scores for any aspects of the work and, only a few "fairly dissatisfied". The issues that caused residents to be 'fairly dissatisfied' were identified and promptly addressed.

A fire occurred in a flat in East Point on Sunday 10th March caused by a chip pan fire. The recently installed sprinkler system was activated by the intense heat generated in the kitchen and extinguished the fire. London Fire Brigade attended and turned off the sprinkler discharge. No residents were reported hurt following the incident.

Petticoat Tower – Middlesex Street Estate

The successful contractor, Harmony Fire, commenced on site in mid-October 2023, beginning with pre-condition surveys, site setup, and booking installation appointments with residents. Additional asbestos surveys will be required for approximately 50% of the 88 flats.

A busy period of engagement with residents has been commenced, with open viewings of the completed and redecorated pilot flat on 27 September, and “Meet the Contractor” events. Several tenants and leaseholders are refusing access for the works.

To date, communal areas have mechanical rises and controls have been 23 installed on all floors. Textured coating materials that may contain asbestos are being identified and remediated. The main water storage tank for the sprinkler system has been installed.

Great Arthur House – Golden Lane Estate

Members will be aware from previous reports that the sprinkler installation at Great Arthur House is to be incorporated into a wider compartmentation and fire safety works project. The project team are looking to commission a Fire Strategy for the building before an application for Listed Building Consent can proceed.

Fire Doors

7. As Members will be aware, the Corporation has 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 Fire Door Replacement Programme, also provides for the installation/upgrade of fire stopping/compartmentation solutions to, for example, penetrations above and through the communal doors and frames (service pipes, service cables etc).
8. GERDA, our specialist appointed contractor, continues to make good progress with the fire door installation programme as set out below.

Lot 1 – York Way and Holloway Estates

The work in Lot 1, to install new upgraded replacement fire doors (front entrances and communal doors) on the York Way and Holloway Estates is now complete. Customer satisfaction with this project, as gauged from our Customer Satisfaction Surveys, was very high (around 96% satisfied or very satisfied).

Lot 2 – Avondale Square Estate

GERDA has installed 340 fire doors across the Avondale Square Estate that, have also clearly been very well received by residents (as evidenced by the Customer Satisfaction Surveys).

GERDA will be mobilising into the Point Blocks over the coming weeks with a view to commencing works shortly. Works to these blocks had previously been held to allow the sprinkler installation programme and the work to install fibre optics (statutory undertaking) to complete. United Living will still have a presence on site so contractors will need to coordinate appropriately.

Lot 3 – Sumner Buildings, William Blake Estate, Dron House, Petticoat Tower (communal doors)

Work to Lot 3 has now commenced, with the first doors installed in the Sumner Buildings during the week commencing 11 September. The works to Sumner Buildings are expected to take five weeks to complete (subject to residents granting access) with William Blake Estate and Dron House to follow. The final works to Lot 3, the replacement of the communal doors in Petticoat Tower, will commence when the project for the sprinkler installation has progressed far enough to allow.

Works at Sumner Buildings, Dron House and William Blake Estate are almost complete. Access issues persist at a small number of properties; we are working with Estate teams to resolve. Works to the communal doors in Petticoat Tower are on hold pending the completion of the sprinkler install.

Lot 4 – Southwark Estate, Windsor House, Isleden House, Sydenham Hill Estate, Spitalfields

Reform Architects have been appointed to lead the design work for Lot 4. There will be an initial focus on Sydenham Hill due to the extra complications of the Listing and previous experience of lengthy timescales when dealing with Lewisham. Other Estates within this Lot will also require engagement with host borough Local Authority Planning where residential front doors open onto external balconies.

Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs)

9. As Members will be aware from the report prepared for its meeting on 2 June 2023, following a corporate procurement exercise, Turner & Townsend (T&T) was appointed

to undertake the next round of FRAs for the Corporation's social housing estates. Type 3 FRAs for each of our residential blocks of flats on our social housing estates were subsequently completed, analysed, and agreed.

10. Residential blocks and, where appropriate, associated community centres, have FRA reports, in which observations on key areas found on the day of the assessment were recorded. Areas identified in each of the FRAs are broadly categorised into the following:

- issues that require immediate remedial action and could be resolved immediately by teams on site;
- matters requiring contractor intervention;
- matters that are/will be subject to or incorporated into major works projects.

11. The latest FRAs also refer to positive practices/innovation, acknowledging that some of the Corporation's fire safety and major works improvements projects go beyond the current minimum statutory requirements including, the new fire doors and installation of sprinklers. The FRAs also refer to future considerations and impacts of the introduction of new legislation, regulations, best practice etc.

12. The main themes identified by the latest FRAs undertaken by T&T include:

Fire doors/fire stopping/compartimentation

The areas highlighted under this category form part of the Corporation's Housing Major Works Programme. The Corporation's Fire Door Replacement Programme incorporates front entrance doors to all flats (including, associated door frames and surrounds), communal fire doors and riser/service cupboard doors (part of the fire stopping and compartmentation work). Work to replace fire doors and improve compartmentation has already been completed on two estates since the FRAs were carried out and, work has also started on several other estates. It was also noted in the FRAs, that significant related projects, including the installation of sprinklers within flats would also address concerns around fire stopping and compartmentation.

Fire alarms

Any problems identified with existing fire alarms on the day that the FRA survey was carried out, were addressed, and remedied immediately by the on-site estate teams.

The FRAs have identified potential improvements (not statutory) in some of our homes and, in some case, these may be incorporated into future major works projects. One example of this, is the City of London's Almshouses, where it is proposed to carry out a significant upgrade to the existing fire alarm installation, to incorporate both carbon monoxide and environmental monitoring. The enhanced system will also allow for live remote monitoring of alarm activation and faults.

A full pilot system has been installed in one flat. A full scope of the enhanced fire alarm is being undertaken by our contractors, incorporating electrical installation condition reports, to provide full surveying and costs of this project.

Emergency lighting

Where the FRAs highlighted that whenever emergency lighting systems are to be upgraded/replaced, due consideration must be given to the presence of 'borrowed' external lighting, which may no longer be relied upon to provide sufficient additional lighting to meet the new requirements.

As part of a review of emergency lighting provision across Housing, a paper will be brought forward in due course.

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS)/Premises Information Box (PIB)

Although the introduction of PEEPS did not make it into recently introduced legislation as expected, this topic continues to be discussed within several forums at national level. Progress of any potential introduction will continue to be monitored and updates provided to this Committee.

Members will recall from previous reports however, as part of its work to ensure a high standard of fire safety in the homes it manages, the Corporation has introduced a new procedure for assessing vulnerable residents, who may need help evacuating in an emergency or, who may benefit from further help and advice on fire safety issues in their homes. Having carried out over 220 evacuation assessments of vulnerable residents, relevant information has been included in the Premises Information Boxes (PIB) installed across our estates.

Following on from the completion of previous FRAs, the number, location, and contents of the PIBs have been reviewed to ensure they are readily accessible for emergency responders. Secure PIBs include person (resident) vulnerability lists. These lists are refreshed every six months or, when new person specific information becomes known. No personal details are included within the list, only their location within the residential block.

Testing/records

As stated previously, in the case of emergency lighting, a key part of the FRA process is demonstrating that systems and equipment in our blocks of flats are tested as per the required regulatory frequency. In addition to the testing, records are kept demonstrating effective management of both active and passive fire protection.

13. Carrying out FRAs 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 however, specify how often FRAs should be carried out or reviewed. Officers have been working very closely with colleagues in the Corporate Fire Safety team to ensure that FRAs on our housing estates are not only carried out in line with the provisions of the RRO but also, are carried out in accordance with the Corporation's own guidance, best practice, and the Fire Risk Assessment Prioritisation Tool.

Housing Compliance Working Party

18. Although members receive many reports on fire safety and compliance with other statutory measures applicable to housing through the committee process, officers are of the view that it would be of significant benefit to set up a Housing Compliance Working Party (HCWP). It is envisaged that the HCWP will comprise officers and members working together to have oversight of the work that the Corporation is doing to ensure it remains compliant with current health and safety legislation, best practice, and regulatory standards relating to fire safety and other relevant statutory housing safety legislation including:

- gas
- electricity
- water testing (legionella)
- asbestos management
- lift maintenance • RAAC.

19. Members are asked to agree to the proposal to set up the HCWP and, to identify up to three members of this Sub Committee to work with officers to take this forward.

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