

Committee:	Date:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	26 Sept 2017
Subject: Fire Safety Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
Report authors: Paul Murtagh and Jacquie Campbell	
Summary	
The purpose of this report is to update Members on fire safety matters since the paper presented by officers to the July meeting.	
Recommendation	
Members are asked to note and comment upon the report.	

Main Report

Background

1. Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in West London, a paper was presented to your Sub-Committee, the Community & Children's Services Committee and the Audit & Risk Management Committee. This paper outlined actions taken in the immediate aftermath of the fire, and subsequently. It also set out plans for actions to be taken.
2. This paper updates Members on work carried out since July on the measures set out in the report.

Fire Risk Assessments

3. Frankham Risk Management Services Limited has been commissioned to carry out new fire risk assessments (FRA's) for each of our residential blocks. These new FRA's will be very detailed and will cover not only those areas previously inspected, but also any further concerns raised since the Grenfell Tower fire.
4. Work on the new FRA's has now commenced, with Golden Lane being the first estate to be assessed. Once all the assessments have been completed and submitted to us, they will be analysed by Property Services, Estate Management and the City's Fire Safety Advisor for accuracy and detail. Any

urgent recommendations will be addressed immediately and a subsequent detailed Action Plan will be developed to plan, programme and implement all other recommendations as appropriate.

5. It is expected that the new FRA's on our social housing residential blocks will be complete by the beginning of November. A summary report outlining the headline findings from the newly completed FRA's will be presented to your Sub-Committee at the earliest opportunity after the Action Plan has been finalised.
6. It is intended that the new FRA's will be made available to residents through the new Housing Fire Safety pages on the City's website. The current FRA's have already been made available here.
7. Work has for some time been well underway in addressing urgent issues highlighted by the previous (2016) FRA's carried out by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited. This urgent work includes improving fire safety signage in our blocks, removing barriers to fire escape routes, improving emergency lighting and remedial works to communal fire doors.

Communication with Residents

8. Detailed information, in the form of question and answer sheets, have been produced specifically for each of our estates and have been delivered to all homes. They too have also been posted on the Housing Fire Safety pages on the City's website. Feedback from residents has been very positive.
9. A further follow-up letter was sent to residents in early September, updating them on actions being taken, and addressing any specific concerns raised on their estates since the question and answer sheets were distributed.
10. Estate staff have been proactively identifying households where there may be vulnerable residents and have been making sure records are up to date and offering support. Any resident unsure of fire escape routes in their particular block have been offered a visit from estate staff.
11. A series of five informal drop-in meetings have been held at estates where there are blocks of flats of six or more floors. These have been attended by the Director of Community & Children's Services and the two Assistant Directors, plus other staff. The sessions were advertised as an opportunity for any residents with concerns about fire safety to ask questions and talk to senior managers. Attendance has been low, typically ranging from 2-10 residents, which indicates that initial concerns have largely been addressed. Nevertheless, the residents who have attended have found them very useful and have expressed their appreciation for the sessions.
12. New fire notices have been created, clarifying that the London Fire Brigade (LFB) continues to advise residents to stay in their flat in the event of a fire in their block, but also advising them on what to do if their flat is affected by fire or smoke, or they feel in danger. We hope this will address the confusion that some residents expressed about what to do in the event of a fire.

Front Doors, Sprinkler Systems and Alarms

13. We have identified a number of front entrance doors from each of our residential blocks of flats that have been, or will be, sent away to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) for rigorous fire resistance testing. This will give us the information we need in relation to the level of fire resistance these doors and frames currently provide and whether or not that level of fire resistance is adequate. Consequently, we will be able to properly prioritise, plan and cost out our door replacement programme. Priority for testing has been given to our tower blocks.
14. At Great Arthur House, a recent inspection from the LFB identified a fire safety issue relating to the glazed fanlights above the front entrance doors. Immediate remedial action was required and has been taken and our Contractors are in the process of replacing all the existing glazed fanlights with fully compliant fire resistant alternatives.
15. The current programme of electrical testing on all estates includes the installation of hard-wired carbon monoxide, smoke and heat detectors in all our tenanted flats. This work, which had commenced well before the Grenfell Tower fire, is progressing well.
16. A feasibility study into the potential installation of sprinkler systems in our tower blocks has been commissioned. All the relevant surveys have now been completed and we are now awaiting submission of the final report from our consultant, Butler & Young. We expect to be in a position to present the findings from the feasibility study to Members before the end of the calendar year.
17. The LFB continues to advise against the installation of fire alarms in communal areas but, this will be reviewed over time as part of the new FRA process.

Estate Management

18. Estate staff have stepped up their work to ensure that balconies, walkways and exits are kept clear from hazards. This includes the removal of combustible material from outside properties, along with any items which might cause a trip hazard for residents or firefighting crews in the event of an emergency.
19. The vast majority of residents have understood the need to comply with guidance and have worked with officers to reduce items outside their homes. However, some have been more difficult and have not complied. Having issued notices, given extensive warning, offered help and advice and also offered mediation, we are now in a position where we will have no choice but to remove any residents' items which do not meet our Fire Safety Protocol, as agreed by Members. Whilst we are fully entitled to remove any items from communal areas, we do ensure that proper notice is given to residents and items are stored for a period of time to allow owners to collect them.
20. A review of estate walkabouts and checks has commenced, with a view to improving consistency and monitoring, and to introducing an automated system for recording data and follow up actions.

Resources

21. As Members will appreciate the level of work relating to fire safety that has arisen, and continues to arise, in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire has been unprecedented. The vast burden of this work has fallen on the existing staff within the Housing Property Services and Estate Management teams. Staff have responded commendably to the challenge that this considerable amount of extra work has created and their efforts have been reflected in the positive feedback we have received from residents in dealing with, and allaying, their fears in relation to fire safety in their homes.
22. We have recently appointed a new Health and Safety Manager within DCCS, whose main priority is to co-ordinate our work around fire safety with particular focus on the FRA process and the implementation of the resulting Action Plans.
23. It may be prudent at this stage, to alert Members to the potential need for additional resources to ensure that we are able to deal effectively with the fire safety improvement measures that we are considering and have committed to with particular regard to:
 - Door replacement programme;
 - Installation of fire suppression systems (sprinklers);
 - Fire safety management planning;
 - Property inspections and visits to assess and advise on fire safety risks in homes, discuss the support needs of households and address any other issues;
 - Communications and website development.
24. At this stage, until we have the results of the fire resistance testing, feasibility study into sprinklers, completion of the new round of FRS's and information from government in relation to changes in Building Regulations and guidance from the Grenfell Tower enquiry, we are not in a position to properly identify any additional resources that may be required. We will naturally keep Members informed on this matter, and seek the necessary approvals, when we are in a position to do so.

Background Papers:

Fire Safety in the City's Residential Blocks – report to Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee, 03 July 2017

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