

Report – Community and Children’s Services Committee

Fire Door Replacement Programme

To be presented on Thursday, 16th January 2020

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons
of the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

SUMMARY

Following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower in 2017, the City of London Corporation began an extensive review of the fire safety of its social housing estates. Early on it was determined that the front doors of many units did not meet present standards and were a significant risk to the compartmentation of the units. Therefore, the City of London Corporation made a public commitment to embark on an enhanced front door replacement programme. The vast majority of front entrance doors in the City’s residential blocks are as originally installed and have reached the end of their useful life. This project proposes a programme of works to provide replacement doors which will give up to 60 minutes fire resistance; with 30 minutes as an absolute minimum if 60 minutes is not achievable or appropriate.

The quickest route to getting the fire doors up to standard simultaneously, across multiple sites, is to procure the works on an estate-by-estate basis. The cost difference between this and procuring a single contractor is believed to be negligible. The cost of the fire door replacement programme is £8,954,000 (comprising of £7,964,000 works costs and £990,000 for fees and staff costs) to be funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The works will also include the replacement of front doors to long leaseholders’ flats, which are also the City Corporation’s responsibility.

RECOMMENDATION

The Court of Common Council is asked to approve the progression of the HRA Estates Fire Door Replacement Programme, to ‘Gateway 5’ of the City of London Corporation’s Projects Procedure (Authority to Start Work), at a cost of £8.954m (comprising £7,964,000 works costs and £990,000 for fees and staff costs), funded by the HRA.

NB. Procurement of contracts will be on an estate-by-estate basis and each procured contract will be authorised by a separate Gateway 5 report, on the regular approval track.

MAIN REPORT

Background

1. Post the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, the City Corporation made a public commitment to embark on an enhanced front door replacement programme to bring all front doors up to a 60 minute fire resistance standard where possible; with 30 minutes as an absolute minimum where 60 minutes is not achievable or appropriate.

2. The expected life-span of a timber main entrance door is between 20 and 30 years and, in the main, this has been exceeded across the City's estates. The vast majority of front entrance doors in the City's residential blocks are as originally installed and have reached the end of their useful life. Random sample destruction testing of several front entrance doors has indicated an average fire resistance time of 16 minutes. Although this is in line with what was predicted for doors in their original condition, it gives serious cause for concern when set against recommendations from many of the 2018 Fire Risk Assessments.
3. Your Projects Sub and Community and Children's Services Committees have considered and approved a procurement programme for multiple contracts, on an estate-by-estate basis, to undertake the fire door replacement programme. This will provide the quickest route to getting the fire doors up to standard, at multiple sites, simultaneously. The cost differences between this and the option to procure a single contractor are believed to be negligible. The project's progress will be monitored and reported monthly to the officer's Housing Programme Board.

Current position

4. This project proposes a programme of works to replace all front entrance doors, including associated panel surrounds and fanlight windows, within City of London housing managed residential blocks of flats, excluding those covered by existing programmes. The project will also include the replacement of any communal corridor fire doors, any fire escape doors from flats, and any doors to electrical intake cupboards that need to be fire rated.
5. The project will exclude new build blocks (Horace Jones House, Twelve Acres House), the City's stock of residential houses, and blocks where front entrance doors have been recently upgraded (Petticoat Square), or where projects to upgrade front entrance doors to an appropriate standard are already well advanced (Petticoat Tower, Great Arthur House).

Implications

Risk

6. Whilst the overall risk to the budget is low, the key risks are potential delays in securing heritage approvals, which may impact on the delivery programme. This will be mitigated by procuring contracts on an estate-by-estate basis. Additionally, the lead-in time for manufacture of fire doors may be greater than anticipated due to demand pressures on manufacturers. Post the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, it should be noted that we are in a supplier's market.

Financial

7. The cost of progressing of Fire Door Replacement Programme by procuring contracts to replace HRA estate fire doors on an estate-by-estate basis, is £8.954m (comprising of £7,964,000 works costs and £990,000 for fees and staff costs) to be funded by the HRA. Whilst HRA funding is confirmed, a reprioritisation of other less safety critical works may be required to ensure sufficient resource is available when required.

8. It should be noted that funding for the City Fund aspect of the programme (covering flats at Spitalfields only and estimated at £136,000 plus £10,000 fees and staff costs) will be requested separately via the Capital Bids process.
9. The works will include the replacement of front doors to long leaseholders' flats, which are the City Corporation's responsibility. However, it has been determined that they are works of improvement rather than repair and, therefore, there is no scope for leaseholder recovery via service charges.

Safety and Reputational

10. If the project is not approved, there are several potential consequences; i.e. - risk to the safety of residents in the event of a fire, risk of damage to the buildings in the event of a fire and the reputational risk to the City Corporation.
11. The City of London Corporation has made a public commitment to embark on an enhanced front door replacement programme. The City Corporation has a statutory duty to keep its residential properties in good repair and meet the requirements for fire safety in Social Housing, as prescribed in Part B of the Buildings Regulations 2010. The random sample destruction testing of several front entrance doors indicated an average fire resistance time of 16 minutes, which gives serious cause for concern when set against recommendations from many of the 2018 Fire Risk Assessments.

Conclusion

12. With the City Corporation's public commitment to upgrade the doors in place, random sample fire destruction testing complete and, given the safety critical nature of this work, your Community & Children's Services and Projects Sub Committees have agreed that this project can be expedited through the Gateway process with a combined Gateway 1-4 report. This will mitigate against undue delay in delivering the works.
13. As the overall cost of the works exceeds £5,000,000, the approval of the Court of Common Council is required to allow the project to proceed beyond Gateway 4. This approval is hereby sought now, in order to allow for the project to proceed as expeditiously as possible.

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 13th day of December 2019

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Randall Keith Anderson
Chairman, Community and Children's Services Committee