

Committee(s)	Dated:
Barbican Residents Consultation Committee Barbican Residential Committee	02 March 2020 16 March 2020
Subject: Fire Safety Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Paul Murtagh Assistant Director Barbican & Property Services	

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.

Recommendation

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

Main Report

Background

1. In September 2017, a detailed report was brought to this Committee to update Members on the City of London Corporation's (the Corporation) approach to fire safety on the Barbican Estate. The 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. Subsequently, further update reports have been brought back to Committee on a regular basis with the last one being September 2019. In addition, at its meeting on 4 June 2018, the Committee received a report entitled 'Fire Safety Review', which informed Members of the work that has been done on potential improvement works to enhance the safety of the CoLC's Barbican Residential Estate and its

residents in the event of fire. The report also sought guidance from Members on the strategic direction the CoLC should take in its future approach to fire safety.

3. This paper is intended as a further update.

Fire Risk Assessments

4. As Members will be aware, Frankham Risk Management Services Limited completed FRAs for each of the residential blocks on the Barbican Estate in January/February 2018 and, as agreed by Members, these were published on the CoLC's website.
5. At its meeting on 17 September 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 the Barbican 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.
6. 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.

7. Up until recently, the FRA's for the Barbican residential blocks had been done annually. The FRA's from January/February 2018 have again been reviewed and mandated in line with the Corporation's auditing procedures for FRA's.
8. 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 appreciate, a considerable amount of fire safety work has been done, is being done and is scheduled to be done to maintain the Barbican residential blocks at the required standard.
9. 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 undertaken on the Barbican Estate early in 2021.

Fire Doors

10. As Members will be aware from previous reports, random sample testing of a limited number of front entrance door sets to individual flats in the Barbican has been carried out. This has been an arduous process as a result of the planning requirements relating to the temporary and permanent replacement door sets and, the lack of available testing facilities across the country.
11. The details of the three door sets that were tested are summarised below:

252 Shakespeare Tower

Description: Latched, single leaf, single acting door set with sidescreen and overpanel.
Tested by: Exova Warringtonfire, High Wycombe
Times to failure: Integrity – 35 minutes
Insulation – 24 minutes

When this door set was originally installed, it complied fully with the Building Regulations at the time. The destructive testing has shown that the integrity of the door (resistance to fire) exceeds the modern standard of 30 minutes. In terms of the insulation test, the door failed to meet the modern standard, albeit marginally (six minutes). However, the real problem with this particular door set, was its failure to deal with the passage of smoke. The test showed that smoke was penetrating the door set after a very short period of time (just over two minutes).

A copy of the test report for this particular property is included for Members consideration at Appendix 2 to this report.

9 Breton House

Description: Latched, single leaf, single acting door set with side service cupboard.
Tested by: Centrum Techniki Okretowej, Poland
Times to failure: Integrity (Doorset) – 18 minutes
Integrity (Service cupboard) – 22 minutes

When this door set was originally installed, it complied fully with the Building Regulations at the time. The destructive testing has shown that the integrity of the door set (resistance to fire) does not meet the modern standard of 30 minutes (failed after 18 and 22 minutes). In addition, the door set failed to deal with the passage of smoke. The test showed that smoke was penetrating the door set and service cupboard after a very short period of time (less than two minutes in both cases).

86 Thomas More House

Description: Latched, single leaf, single acting door set with side cupboard door and glazed sidescreen.

Tested by: Laboratory BadanOgniwych, Poland
Times to failure: Integrity (Doorset) – 5 minutes
Integrity (Service cupboard) – 5 minutes
Integrity (Glazed screen) – 8 minutes

When this door set was originally installed, it complied fully with the Building Regulations at the time. The destructive testing has shown that the integrity of the door set (resistance to fire) does not meet the modern standard of 30 minutes (both doors failed after 5 minutes).

12. The planned destructive door set testing (including associated screens and panels) for the Barbican Estate is now complete. The destructive testing has shown that all door sets tested fail to meet the modern standards for fire resistance. It is the recommendation of officers that consideration needs to be given to replacing front door sets to all residential properties on the Barbican Estate with new modern replacements that comply with Approved Document B – Fire Safety of the Building Regulations.

Communication with residents

13. Members will recall that detailed information, in the form of 'Frequently Asked Questions' bulletins, was produced specifically for the Barbican Estate. This was distributed to all House Groups and to residents through our email broadcast service and has also been posted on the Housing Fire Safety pages on the City's website. This information is reviewed on a regular basis and is updated as the fire safety improvement works progress.
14. With the exception of Frobisher Crescent, which is dealt with separately in this report, there have been no new significant fire safety issues raised by residents since the last update report in September 2019. Detailed information on fire safety remains available on the City's website.

Estate Management

15. Barbican Estate staff continue 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.

London Fire Brigade (LFB)

16. 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. Whilst the LFB continues to carry out regular checks and familiarisation visits on the Barbican Estate, there have been no subsequent ad-hoc formal inspections by the LFB.

17. It is worth noting however, that officers have developed a healthy working relationship with the LFB and regularly consult with and seek the advice of the LFB on fire safety matters.

18. On 29 November last year, Members and officers met with David Bulbrook, Borough Commander of the City of London Fire Brigade to discuss fire safety matters relating to the Barbican Estate including:

- the practicality of maintaining a 'stay-put' policy in the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy;
- an understanding as to how the LFB would tackle a fire in one of the towers on the Barbican Estate;
- response times for the LFB when attending emergencies on the Barbican Estate;
- an assessment on the perceived safety of the Barbican Estate in terms of fire;
- sharing knowledge and information about the Barbican Estate and its residents.

19. It was generally felt that the meeting was extremely helpful for all those in attendance and, Barbican Members in particular were reassured by the discussion that took place.

Frobisher Crescent

20. Members will be aware from the last Fire Safety Update Report to this Committee that following the completion of a sample survey of the communal areas and individual dwellings in Frobisher Crescent, deficiencies with the existing compartmentation/fire stopping had been identified.

21. In order to identify the full extent of this problem, a more detailed and specialist survey was undertaken by Guardian Consultancy Services Limited. This survey was completed in December last year and, confirms the full extent of the deficiencies and, the extent of the remedial work required.

22. On the basis of this survey, officers made a Capital Bid for £600,000 to fund the necessary remedial works to the communal areas and individual dwellings in Frobisher Crescent. We have recently been advised that the bid has been approved and, the funding will be available from 1 April this year. We are currently working on the Specification for the extensive remedial works and, it is expected that tender will be obtained by the end of March and, work will commence on site in May/June. It has been agreed that residents will not be recharged the cost of this work.

23. As has been explained previously, we continue to work very closely with our colleagues in the Barbican Arts Centre to ensure that all future fire safety works commissioned by the Estate Office for Frobisher Crescent and the Arts Centre are aligned.

24. It must be remembered however, that whilst the problem identified with the compartmentation/fire stopping is of concern, the overall Risk Assessment of Fire Safety for Frobisher Crescent is 'low'. The design and construction of the three residential floors does incorporate important fire safety measures including:

- secondary means of escape for all flats;
- the installation of hard-wired (plus battery backup) smoke detection, installed to LD3 standard;
- smoke detection in the corridors that is linked to the operation of the fire doors with, an additional activation link to the 24-hour concierge service in Shakespeare Tower;
- appropriate door compartmentation within the corridors.

Further specialist fire safety survey

25. Due to the unique nature of the Barbican Estate, some Members have previously suggested that a more detailed specialist fire safety survey be undertaken on a representative sample of flat blocks on the Estate. The purpose of this specialist survey would be to review and assess specific fire safety precautions such as:

- Communal fire doors;
- Smoke control measures;
- Fire alarm and fire detection measures;
- Escape routes;
- Ventilation provisions.

26. This specialist survey would also satisfy some of the recommendations of the FRA's that were carried out by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited in January/February 2018 and, will help fill in some of the 'gaps' in our understanding of how the residential buildings will perform in the event of a fire. In addition, consideration can also be given to the Phase 1 recommendations made by Sir Martin Bick in relation to the Grenfell fire.

27. In line with the wishes of some Members, discussions have taken place with representatives of Arup, a specialist consultancy firm that was involved in the construction of the Barbican Estate and retains significant knowledge and expertise of its design and maintenance.

28. Arup has recently submitted a fee proposal for the specialist survey of four representative blocks on the Barbican Estate based on the following methodology:

- Stage 1 – desktop review and familiarisation;
- Stage 2 – site survey;
- Stage 3 – site testing.

29. Officers will be submitting a non-public report (due to the commercial sensitivity) to the Barbican Residential Committee meeting on 16 March seeking approval to the appointment of Arup to carry out the specialist survey as outlined above.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Fire Safety Action Plan

Appendix 2 – Test Report for 252 Shakespeare Tower

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