

Committees:	Dates:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	30/11/2020
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 March 2020.

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. 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;
 - Petticoat Tower, Middlesex Street;
 - West Point, Avondale Estate;
 - Central Point, Avondale Estate;
 - East Point, Avondale Estate.
5. Extensive discussions have been held with colleagues in the CoLC's Planning and Building Control Teams in relation to Great Arthur House, which is undoubtedly the most complex of the five high-rise tower blocks particularly, given its listed status. It had been hoped that Great Arthur House would be the first block to benefit from the fitting of an automatic water suppression system but, it is now likely that work will commence on the other blocks first as, these are much less complex.
6. Members will recall that a Gateway 1-4 report for this project has been approved by this Committee and Projects Sub Committee, which provided for:
 - 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.
7. A further Gateway Issues Report has also been agreed by this Committee and Projects Sub Committee for additional funding to finalise the appointment of Butler & Young Associates as Design Consultant to complete the specification and tender documentation. Approval was also received for an increase in the overall project cost to £3,987,000.
8. The proposed design information is now complete and has been incorporated into the specification documents. Tenders for the works will be invited towards the end of November, with a return date of mid-January 2021, to give tenderers adequate time to price accurately and, to take into account potential delays in surveying due to the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown.
9. On completion of a, hopefully, successful procurement exercise, a Gateway 5 Report will be submitted to the relevant Committees for approval to appoint the successful contractor.

10. At this stage, the projected start date for the works is the beginning of April 2021 at Petticoat Tower on the Middlesex Street Estate. Completion of all five high-rise tower blocks should be achieved by October 2021.

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. 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). A combined Gateway 1-4 Report has been approved by the Community & Children's Services Committee and Projects Sub Committee included the following:

- A budget of £150,000 for internal staff costs and professional fees to reach the next Gateway.
- The estimated cost of the project (excluding risk) of £9,100,000.
- Contracts for the works to be procured on an estate-by-estate basis, with each contract authorised by a separate Gateway 5 Report on the regular approval track.

13. Members will recall from the last report to the Sub-Committee, that 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.

14. As a result of the success we have had working with GERDA and, the submission of a detailed Business Case, it has been agreed with colleagues in City Procurement that the Fire Door Replacement Programme will be procured through the Hyde Framework, a suitably specialist framework that will allow us to proceed swiftly using GERDA as our preferred sole supplier.

15. The specification for the first phase of the Fire Door Replacement Programme (York Way and Holloway Estates) is now complete and, will be sent to GERDA to tender week commencing 16 November 2020. Although GERDA has been approved as our sole provider, we still need to complete a formal procurement exercise on an estate-by-estate basis to ensure transparency in the process and to allow for a robust analysis of the tender submissions. The second phase of the programme (Avondale Estate) will follow in January next year. It is expected that work on Phase 1 will begin in February next year.

16. Members will be aware, that GERDA is already undertaking the replacement of front entrance fire doorsets to 80 properties at Petticoat Tower on the Middlesex Street Estate. Following the completion of all internal surveys, arrangements were being made to temporarily decant 40 of the residents to allow for associated asbestos removal works. Unfortunately, as a result of the second lockdown, this work has, unavoidably, been put on hold and, it has been agreed that the work will recommence in January next year, subject of course, to our ability to comply with government guidelines in respect of COVID-19.

Fire Risk Assessments (FRA's)

17. As Members are 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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. Whilst, understandably, our focus has been on continuing the progress we are making on the improvements identified in the Action Plan appended to this report, we will be looking to procure and commission new Type 3 FRA's for each of our residential blocks of flats on our social housing estates early next year.
23. 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. It had been expected that these would be completed by the end of December this year however, as a result of the COVID-19 situation, these surveys will now not be completed until the end of June 2021.

Great Arthur House

24. 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.
25. 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.
26. 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.
27. Following a fully compliant procurement process, Studio Partington was appointed to carry out the design and fire engineering requirements of the project. Despite the restrictions and lockdown, good progress has been made on the options appraisal, fire strategy options and design considerations. In addition, we have recently carried out further investigative works to the communal areas and a small number of flats to appraise the full extent of the works.
28. We are currently at the end of Stage 2 in a three stage design and build process and, the next stage in the process is for the Architects and Fire Engineer to work together to develop detailed designs to enable us to make an application for

Planning and Listed Buildings Consent. We expect to be able to make these applications in March next year.

Fire Signage Project

29. One of the key recommendations from the FRA's completed by Frankhams was the need for us to update the fire safety signage in all our blocks of flats across all our social housing estates. Following a successful procurement exercise, this work was awarded to Britannia Fire & Security Limited. At the time of writing this report, the works to all our blocks of flats, except for the Holloway Estate, is now complete.

London Fire Brigade (LFB)

30. At the time of the last update report in March 2020, 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.

31. Despite the COVID-19 situation and, the two lockdowns, the LFB has continued to carry out these ad-hoc inspections and, one of these has been Corporation owned premises at Crescent House. At the time of writing, we had not received the report from Crescent House.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fire Safety Action Plan

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