

Committee(s): Barbican Residents Consultation Committee Barbican Residential Committee	Dated: 30 November 2020 14 December 2020
Subject: Fire Safety Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3 & 4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
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 March 2020.

Recommendation(s)

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 March 2020. This paper is intended as a further update.

Fire Risk Assessments

3. 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 Corporation's website.
4. 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 be 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. 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 the residential blocks on the Barbican Estate early next year.

Fire Doors

10. As Members will be aware from the previous update report, random sample testing of a three front entrance door sets to individual flats in the Barbican Estate has been carried out. It should be remembered that all three door sets, when installed, complied fully with the Building Regulations that were in force at that time. However, the destructive testing has shown that all three door sets tested failed to meet the modern standards for fire resistance.
11. At its meeting on 16 March 2020, Members agreed with 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.
12. In accordance with the expressed views of Members, Officers have made a Capital Bid for £20million for the replacement of front door sets to all residential properties on the Barbican Estate. At the time of writing this report, there had been no decision made on the bid. It is understood that no final decision will be made until the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 10 December. If the bid is approved, it should be noted that the project will still need to go through the usual project approval process beyond, setting aside funding in the Capital Plan.

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. Except for 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 March 2020. Detailed information on fire safety remains available on the Corporation'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 March this year, 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.

17. In June this year, the LFB carried out four simultaneous ad-hoc inspections on the Barbican Estate at Cromwell Tower, Defoe House, Thomas More House and Speed House. The inspections appeared to go well, with no issues raised on the days they were carried out. We received no follow up reports or requests for further information on any of the four inspections undertaken.
18. It is worth noting 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.

Frobisher Crescent

19. Members will be aware from the previous Fire Safety Update Report to this Committee that following the completion of a detailed and specialist survey undertaken by Guardian Consultancy Services Limited, the full extent of the deficiencies with the existing compartmentation/fire stopping and, the extent of the remedial work required had been identified.
20. Officers subsequently made a successful Capital Bid for £600,000 to fund the necessary remedial works to the communal areas and individual dwellings in Frobisher Crescent. A Gateway 1-4 Project Proposal & Options Appraisal Report was submitted to the Projects Sub Committee and the Barbican Residential Committee (BRC) in September this year and, the following recommendations were agreed:
 - A total revised estimated project cost of £800,000 (including staff and consultancy costs of £100,000).
 - Approval for the expenditure of £60,000 for staff and consultancy fees to reach the next stage of the Gateway process.
 - Note that 'in principle' funding of up to £550,000 for this scheme was agreed as part of the 2020/21 annual capital bids, with draw down being subject to the further approval of the Resource Allocation Sub-Committee. A bid for additional resources will be required to meet the funding shortfall of £250,000 against the estimated cost of £800,000.
 - That approval is given for Option 1:
 - To undertake a compliant procurement exercise for the fire safety improvement works to residential levels 7, 8 and 9 at Frobisher Crescent on the Barbican Residential Estate.
 - To seek Chief Officer approval for a contractor to be appointed to carry out the fire safety improvement works to residential levels 7, 8 and 9 at Frobisher Crescent on the Barbican Residential Estate.
21. The progress with this project has been affected and delayed by the COVID-19 situation and, as a result, on the instruction of the Corporation's Fire Safety Advisor, the following interim works have recently been completed to the residential levels of Frobisher Crescent:

- i. Firestopping to the internal riser cupboards and internal communal corridors to all three residential levels. This work comprised a combination of permanent firestopping solutions, where practical and accessible and, temporary solutions in the form of the installation of 'intumescent' pillows.
- ii. Inspection, testing, repair and certification of all fire doors to the communal corridors and escape routes.
- iii. Allocation and delivery of battery-operated smoke detectors to residents in Frobisher Crescent. It should be noted that, access was difficult and, only 24 residents were handed the smoke detectors. The remaining smoke detectors are stored in the Barbican Estate Office and absent residents were written to, asking them to collect.

22. The specification for the permanent remedial works is now completed and, a procurement exercise will be carried out over the next 4 – 6 weeks. This will allow us to appoint a suitable contractor in January next year with, an expected start date in February 2021. As Members will recall, it has been agreed that residents will not be recharged the cost of this work (including the interim works outlined above).

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.

Further specialist fire safety survey

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. At its meeting on 16 March 2020, the BRC received a report from officers seeking Member approval to a proposal from Arup, a specialist firm of engineering consultants, to carry out a detailed fire safety audit on a representative sample of four residential blocks on the Barbican Estate. The BRC subsequently approved the following:

- The direct appointment of Arup to undertake a detailed fire safety audit on a representative sample of four residential blocks on the Barbican Estate.

- That the appointment of Arup be progressed by way of an appropriate 'compliant waiver' as directed and agreed by City Procurement.
- That the full cost of the detailed fire safety audit is recoverable, by way of service charge, from all long leaseholders on the Barbican Estate.

27. Unfortunately, progress with the fire safety audit has been significantly delayed by COVID-19 and, Arup has only recently confirmed that it is now able to re-open discussions to allow us to progress with its commission. At the time of writing this report, whilst we had met with Arup to discuss the project, exchange information and confirm reporting lines etc, we had not received a start date for the works.

Fire Safety Signage

28. One of the key findings of the FRA's completed by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited in January/February 2018, was the need to update and bring up to standard the fire safety signage across all residential blocks on the Barbican Estate. The existing signage was found to be out of date, inadequate, conflicting and, in some cases, incorrect.

29. Following a compliant procurement exercise, Britannia Fire & Security Limited was appointed to carry out this work. In order to benefit from 'economies of scale', the contract for this work also included similar works across the Corporation's social housing estates, which is almost completed.

30. When work began on the Barbican Estate, residents raised concerns with the replacement signage particularly, in relation to the suitability of the signs in the context of the listed status of the Barbican Estate. In order to address the concerns of residents, the fire signage works on the Barbican Estate were suspended.

31. In order to address and resolve the concerns raised by residents, further advice has been sought from the Corporation's Planning Team in relation to Listed Building Consent. At the time of writing this report, we had not received the information requested from our colleagues in the Planning Team.

32. It is intended that once we have the information we require, we will convene a meeting of the BRC Member/Officer Fire Safety Group to discuss a suitable and compliant way forward.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Fire Safety Action Plan

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