

Committees:	Dates:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	24/05/2021
Subject: Fire Safety Update – HRA Properties	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Paul Murtagh Assistant Director Barbican and 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 November 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. At its meeting on 30 April 2021, the Community & Children's Services Committee approved a Gateway 5 (Authority to Start Work) report for the following:
 - Additional budget of £3,420,705 (including construction costs, consultants' fees and staff costs) for the appointment of United Living (South) Limited to deliver the project and reach the next Gateway.
 - The revised project budget/total estimated cost of £3,722,649 (excluding risk).
 - Approval of a Costed Risk Provision of £350,000 to be drawn down via delegation to Chief Officer.
 - A revised estimated start date of September 2021 and, completion date of April 2022.
8. This project involves the installation of retrofit sprinkler systems inside 424 residential flats in the five HRA residential tower blocks. The system will include sprinkler heads in the living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, and balconies.

The project also includes the installation of fire alarm systems in Petticoat Tower, Centre Point, East Point and West Point, which will provide additional early warning fire detection for the blocks and will be integrated with the new sprinkler systems. Great Arthur House already has a fire alarm system which will also be integrated with the new sprinkler system during installation.

9. The sprinkler system for Great Arthur House will require Listed Building Consent due to its Grade II listed status. This application is currently being finalised and submitted by our design consultants.
10. The success of this project will rely significantly on the co-operation of residents in providing access to enable the fitting of the sprinkler system in their homes. We have recently appointed a communications consultant to work closely with the residents of Great Arthur House to assist with the resident engagement aspect of the Listed Building Consent application. To help this process, we have recently developed and delivered to all residents in Great Arthur House a 'Myth-Busting' Resident Information Booklet which, explains how the sprinkler system will operate and what will and will not happen. It is expected that this will help us co-ordinate all resident consultation and engagement. A copy of the Booklet is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

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 has 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. GERDA, our specialist appointed contractor, has now completed a measured survey of the works for Phase 1 of this programme (York Way and Holloway Estates and, the pricing submission for this phase is expected shortly. If the tender submission is within the expected range, a Gateway 5 report will be prepared and submitted to the relevant Committees for approval to award the contract. Other estates covered by this programme will move into active survey and procurement on a priority basis.

Fire Risk Assessments (FRA's)

14. 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.
15. 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 2 to this report.
16. 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.

17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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 are looking to carry out new Type 3 FRA's for each of our residential blocks of flats on our social housing estates later this year. Following a Corporate procurement exercise, Turner & Townsend has been appointed to undertake the next round of FRA's for Housing. We are currently in discussion with Turner & Townsend on the development of a schedule for carrying out the new FRA's.

Great Arthur House

20. 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.
21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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 continues to be made on the options appraisal, fire strategy options and design considerations
24. We have now completed Stage 3 of the design process, which provides us with the outline designs and drawings to enable us to consult with planning on our proposals. Before we can proceed to Stage 4 of the process, we need to see and integrate the designs for the new sprinkler system. Stage 4 will formalise the designs and, will form part of our Planning Application for Listed Building Consent (please refer to the Resident Update included at Appendix 3 to this report).
25. Whilst we are waiting for the completion of the designs for the new sprinkler system, we are continuing with the remaining investigative opening-up works to ensure that we fully understand and appraise those areas that have not been previously exposed. In addition, we are carrying out destructive testing on the proposed door solutions.

Fire Signage Project

26. 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. The works to all to all our blocks of flats has now been completed.

London Fire Brigade (LFB)

27. As has been reported previously, the LFB continues to carry 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.
28. Members will recall from its meeting in November last year, that the LFB carried out an inspection at Crescent House however, at the time of writing, we had still not received the Inspection Report from the LFB.
29. In December last year, the LFB carried out an ad-hoc fire safety inspection at Penfields House on the York Way Estate and, subsequently issued a 'Notice of Fire Safety Deficiencies'. These deficiencies were dealt with in a responsible and effective way and, the Assistant Director wrote back to the LFB to advise on the action that had been taken.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Resident Information Booklet (Sprinklers) – Great Arthur House
- Appendix 2: Fire Safety Action Plan
- Appendix 3: Resident Update (Compartmentation) – Great Arthur House

Paul Murtagh, Assistant Director, Barbican and Property Services
T: 020 7332 3015
E: paul.murtagh@cityoflondon.gov.uk