

Committees:	Dates:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	15/11/2021
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 May 2021.

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. Following completion of a compliant, competitive tendering exercise and, approval of a Gateway 5 Report to the relevant Committees, United Living has been appointed to carry out the installation of automatic water suppression systems in each of the CoLC's five social housing high-rise tower blocks. The contract for the works has now been signed and, it is expected that work will start on the Avondale Square Estate later this month. The installations in Petticoat Tower and Great Arthur House will follow, with the project scheduled for full completion in November 2022.
6. Site inspections have been undertaken in three tenanted properties on the Avondale Point blocks to identify potential routes for the pipework. Further meetings have been held with the Planning Officer on site at Great Arthur House to discuss the requirements of a Listed Building Application for the works.
7. Two void properties have been identified (one in Great Arthur House and one in Petticoat Tower) for 'pilot' installations. Once the works have been completed in these two flats, they will be used to demonstrate to affected residents how the system works, how the installation is carried out and, what it looks like when completed.
8. 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 continue to liaise closely with our communications consultant to work with the residents of Great Arthur House to assist with the resident engagement aspect of the Listed Building Consent application.

Fire Doors

9. 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.

10. 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). 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 has now been received. It is expected that work on the York Way and Holloway Estates will start in the next few weeks, with other estates covered by this programme moving into active survey and procurement on a subsequent priority basis.

Fire Risk Assessments (FRA's)

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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 bring our housing stock up to the required standard. It will, however, take time.

16. 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, it has been agreed that we will carry out new Type 3 FRA's for each of our residential blocks of flats on our social housing estates during 2021/22.
17. Following a Corporate procurement exercise, Turner & Townsend was appointed to undertake the next round of FRA's for Housing and, work is now well underway. So far to date, Turner & Townsend has completed the following FRA's:
- Windsor House Estate (report received).
 - Golden Lane Estate (reports yet to be submitted).
 - Middlesex Street Estate (report yet to be submitted).
18. The inspection and survey work for the FRA's on the Avondale Square Estate is now underway and, it is expected that the FRA's across all the CoLC's social housing estates will be completed, and reports submitted, by the end of March 2022.

Great Arthur House

19. 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.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. As Members will be aware from previous reports, following a fully compliant procurement process, Studio Partington was appointed to carry out the design and fire engineering requirements of the project. Stage 3 of the design process has been completed, which provides us with the outline designs and drawings to enable us to consult with planning on our proposals.

23. Following further discussions between officers, colleagues in Planning and the respective consultants on the sprinkler project and this Great Arthur House project, it has been decided that this project will be 'put on hold' until the sprinkler project is completed. This makes perfect sense as, the installation of the sprinklers will considerably affect the safety of the building (and its residents) in the event of a fire and, will have a significant impact on the level of additional fire safety measures (such as compartmentation) required in the building.

Fire Signage Project

24. 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)

25. 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.

26. This year, the LFB has carried out several ad-hoc fire safety inspections on CoLC blocks of flats on our York Way and Avondale Square Estates. The LFB has subsequently issued a 'Notice of Fire Safety Deficiencies' for each of the blocks inspected. These deficiencies have been dealt with in a responsible and effective way and, the Assistant Director has written to the LFB to advise on the action that had been taken.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fire Safety Action Plan

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