

Committee(s)	Dated:
Barbican Residents Consultation Committee Barbican Residential Committee	20 September 2022 30 September 2022
Subject: Fire Safety Update	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children’s Services	For Information
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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of this Committee with information on how the City of London Corporation (the Corporation), through its Housing Property Services Team, is ensuring that its homes on the Barbican Residential Estate are managed in a way that meets compliance with current health and safety legislation, best practice, and regulatory standards relating to fire safety.

This report also provides an update for Members on the progress that has been made in relation to fire safety matters since the last report submitted to Committee in January 2022.

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 in January 2022. This paper is intended as a further update.

Fire Risk Assessments

3. As Members are 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.
5. 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.

6. Up until 2018, 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.
7. 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.
8. Whilst, understandably, our focus has been on continuing the progress we are making on the improvements identified in the Action Plan from the 2018 FRA's, work is now well underway on the new FRA's for the Barbican Estate. Following a Corporate procurement exercise, Turner & Townsend was appointed to undertake the next round of FRA's for both Housing and Barbican. Turner & Townsend has

now completed the survey work for the FRA's on all blocks across the Barbican Estate and, officers are currently reviewing and analysing the initial draft reports. The FRA's for the car parks across the Barbican Residential Estate are being done separately and, surveys are now in progress.

9. It is expected and scheduled that Turner & Townsend will complete the new Type 3 FRA's for the whole of the Barbican Estate (including the car parks) by mid-November and, Officers will be reporting the outcome of the 2022 FRA's, along with a new Action Plan, to the Barbican Residential Committee (BRC) at its meeting in December.
10. It should be noted that, any urgent matters identified during the surveys for the new FRA's on the Barbican Estate are immediately reported to us to ensure that immediate action can be taken. Such instances so far to date include the storage and charging of electric scooters/mobility chairs in communal areas, obstructed fire exits and escape routes and service cupboard fire doors not closing correctly.

Fire Doors

11. As Members will be aware from previous update reports, random sample destructive testing of three front entrance door sets to individual flats on the Barbican Estate was carried out. Although, all three door sets, when installed, complied fully with the Building Regulations that were in force at that time, the destructive testing showed that all three door sets tested failed to meet the modern standards for fire resistance.
12. In accordance with the expressed views of Members, Officers made a successful Capital Bid for £20million for the replacement of front entrance 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.
13. At its meeting on 15 March 2021, Members approved a Gateway 2 Report for the Barbican Fire Door Replacement Programme, which provided for the following:
 - approval of a budget of £275,000 for internal staff costs and professional fees to reach the next Gateway.
 - noting the total estimated cost of the project at £20,000,000 (excluding risk).
 - noting the risks contained in the Risk Register.
14. Following the completion of a compliant procurement exercise, we appointed Guardian Consultancy Services Limited to carry out a full audit and survey of all the fire doors across the Barbican Estate. This work is now complete and all fire doors across the Estate have been identified to enable officers to group the doors into a structured programme based on priority. A further exercise has been undertaken by our appointed consultant, reForm Architects, to confirm the existing compartmentation lines within the communal areas and map them out on scaled drawings. This exercise will help us identify and challenge areas where standards or legislation have changed since the buildings were originally constructed. The completed drawings are now with our fire engineering specialist, BB7, for verification.

15. Once the compartmentation drawings have been signed off by BB7, they will form part of the design tender and, along with the fire door audits, will enable the procurement of the Design Team for the project. Once the Design Team has been appointed, a structured programme for the replacement of the doors on a block-by-block basis will be formulated and shared.

Communication with residents

16. 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.

17. There have been no new significant fire safety issues raised by residents since the last update report in January 2022. Detailed information on fire safety remains available on the Corporation's website.

Estate Management

18. Barbican Estate Office (BEO) 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.

Fire Related Incidents on the Barbican Estate

19. In July this year, there were two reported kitchen fires on the Barbican Estate, both of which, required the attendance of the London Fire Brigade (LFB).

20. The first incident occurred when a resident, who was away from home, contacted the BEO reception to report that they thought they had left the oven on. Staff in the BEO attended immediately and, seeing smoke from the kitchen, entered the property through an open balcony door. The oven had indeed been left on and although, the item in the oven was burnt through and there was a lot of smoke, there was no fire.

21. The second incident occurred when, a pan caught fire on a kitchen hob and spread to the kitchen extractor unit. The LFB was called and attended to extinguish the fire. Although the fire did reach the kitchen extractor unit, it did not breach the variable control damper within the extractor unit and subsequently, did not enter the communal shunt duct system. On this occasion, the fire was likely exacerbated by a lack of cleaning and a build up of grease within the kitchen extractor unit.

22. Since July, two further messages have gone out to Barbican residents via the Weekly Bulletin, emphasising the importance of cleaning the kitchen extraction unit and, advising residents that this is a service that the BEO can provide on request. The BEO recommends that the kitchen extractor units are cleaned annually.

23. Prior to the two incidents above in July this year, the last known incident occurred in March 2020, where a resident forgot something they had put on the hob. There was no damage to the property.

London Fire Brigade (LFB)

24. Members will be aware from previous reports 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.

25. The LFB attends the Barbican Estate on a regular basis to carry out routine safety inspections, provide advice to residents and, to discuss fire safety related matters with officers. In August 2021, the LFB carried out formal ad-hoc fire safety inspections on all three towers on the Barbican Estate. A few minor recommendations were made at the time of the inspections and, these were acted upon immediately. There were no formal reports from the LFB as a result of these inspections and, although we understood that the LFB would carry out further inspections of the three towers every three months, this has not happened presumably, due to resource issues and other commitments.

Frobisher Crescent

26. Members will be aware from previous reports, that concerns had been raised about the level and efficiency of the fire stopping carried out as part of the redevelopment of the top three floors of Frobisher Crescent to create new residential apartments. Following the completion of a detailed and specialist (but non-intrusive) compartmentation survey, we had a much clearer understanding of the extent of the deficiencies with the existing compartmentation/fire stopping and consequently, the extent of the remedial work that is required.

27. Following a compliant competitive procurement exercise, Guardian Consultancy Services Limited (Guardian) was appointed to carry out the remedial compartmentation/fire stopping works and, the substantive works began on 10 January this year, with further intrusive surveys and investigation works. As part of the Communications Strategy for this project, the contractor and relevant officers meet monthly with nominated representatives of Frobisher Crescent residents and regular updates are provided to all residents.

28. The success of this project is heavily reliant on the co-operation of Frobisher Crescent residents, as well as the collaboration and support of the Corporation's Planning and Building Control Teams. In addition, 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.

29. The project is currently two months behind the original programme for the works due, in the main, to the time taken for confirmation of the proposed technical solutions and, for Building Control to engage with us on site. Additional investigation works have been necessary to identify and agree on some of the

proposed technical solutions particularly, the proposed solution between the flats and corridors. Unfortunately, the original proposed solution was found to be unsuitable and, until this matter had been resolved, it made no sense to commence with other parts of the project.

30. As part of the due diligence and quality control aspect of this project, BM Trada recently carried out a detailed audit on the work completed to date and, has confirmed that the work done and the solutions installed are of good quality and, comply fully with the third-party accreditation scheme required for this project.
31. Now that adequate progress has been made with Building Control and BM Trada in identifying and agreeing the revised solutions for the critical elements of the compartmentation/fire stopping works, Guardian is increasing its labour on site and the pace of the project will increase accordingly. We currently anticipate that the works will be completed by December this year.

Further specialist fire safety surveys

32. Due to the unique nature of the Barbican Estate, it was agreed that further detailed specialist fire safety survey should be undertaken on a representative sample of flat blocks on the Barbican Estate. The purpose of these specialist surveys 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
 - Compartmentation/fire stopping.
33. These specialist surveys would also satisfy some of the recommendations of the FRA's that were carried out by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited 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.
34. Arup, a specialist firm of engineering consultants, was subsequently appointed to carry out a detailed fire safety audit on a representative sample of residential blocks on the Barbican Estate. Arup has now completed its work and reports have been received for Andrewes House, Cromwell Tower and Mountjoy. A detailed report on the outcome of the work done by Arup and, a subsequent Action Plan, is included as a separate report to this Committee.
35. We have also recently completed specific compartmentation/fire stopping surveys of the communal areas to Brandon Mews, Defoe House, and Shakespeare Tower. The reports are being analysed and, the outcome and recommendations from the report will be included in the Fire Safety Update Report to this Committee in December.

Fire Safety Signage

36. One of the key findings of the FRA's completed by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited in January/February 2018, was the need to 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.
37. 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 now complete.
38. 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. To address the concerns of residents, the fire signage works on the Barbican Estate were suspended.
39. Following further discussions with the Corporation's Planning Team and, a compliant procurement exercise, we appointed rePurpose Architects to develop and produce a bespoke Fire Strategy Document for the Barbican Residential Estate that would analyse the existing fire safety signage on the Estate and, set out the proposals for, and the reasoning behind the new fire safety signage for the various blocks.
40. The Fire Strategy Document has been completed and submitted to colleagues in Planning for consideration. We have subsequently been advised that Listed Building Consent is required for these works due to a lack of clarity around the Estate Management Guidelines and, reForm Architects has now been appointed to prepare and submit a detailed application for Listed Building Consent.
41. The Fire Strategy Document has also been submitted to the LFB for comment and, the LFB has confirmed that it is "in line with the LFB's expectations". The document has recently been shared with members of the Asset Maintenance Working Group and, we will be taking into consideration any comments and observations received.

Evacuation Assessments for Vulnerable Residents

42. There is no legal requirement for personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEP's) in high-rise housing (the government rejected this proposal earlier this year). However, as part of its work to ensure a high standard of fire safety in the homes we manage, the Corporation has introduced a new procedure for assessing vulnerable residents, who may need help evacuating in an emergency or, who may benefit from further help and advice on fire safety issues in their homes.
43. In February/March this year, the BEO wrote to all residents on the Barbican Estate asking them to fill out a short survey should they feel that any member of their household would struggle to evacuate the building in the event of an emergency. This was followed up with two reminders in the Weekly Bulletin in March and April and, a further reminder in August.

44. To date, 67 households have responded to inform us that they (or other members of their household) may have difficulty evacuating the building if they had a fire in their home. Of those 67 responses, 24 households advised that they had no working smoke detectors in their homes. These households were immediately advised to contact the LFB to organise a free Home Safety Inspection. In some instances, with the resident's permission, the House Officer Team made appointments for them directly with the LFB. Where residents declined a LFB visit, the Corporation's Property Services Officers installed smoke detectors for them.
45. All the 67 households that responded to our letter have been contacted personally by the House Officer Team. Advice has been given about what residents should do in the event of a fire (raise the alarm, leave the property, close the door behind you, try to take a phone with you etc).
46. Relevant information has been included in the Premises Information Boxes installed across the Barbican Estate and, is also lodged with the local car park box/lobby as, this is often the first point of call for the LFB in the event of a 'call-out'. This information is checked and updated quarterly.
47. The BEO continues to work with residents on this matter as, we do believe that there are more households on the Barbican Estate who would benefit from this service than the 67 that have come forward so far to date. We continue to include quarterly reminders in the Weekly Bulletin, as well as a specific focused estate-wide mailout every year.
48. All information we hold regarding residents' circumstances relating to this initiative is managed, used, and stored securely in strict accordance with corporate data protection policies.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Fire Safety Action Plan

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