

Committee(s): Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee – For Information	Dated: 14102022
Subject: Fire Safety Update – HRA Properties	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 4, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of Andrew Carter Executive Director of Community & Children’s Services	For Information
Report author: Paul Murtagh Assistant Director, Barbican and Property Services Department of Community & Children’s Services	

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 its twelve social housing estates 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 this Sub- Committee in November 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 Corporation’s 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 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 Corporation'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 Estate;
 - Petticoat Tower, Middlesex Street Estate;
 - 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 was appointed to carry out the installation of automatic water suppression systems in each of the Corporation's five social housing high-rise tower blocks. However, due to escalating costs and potential time delays, Great Arthur House and Petticoat Tower have been removed from the contract with United Living. Work started at West Point on the Avondale Square Estate on 20 September and is forecast to complete just before Christmas this year. Work will start at Centre Point in late January and East Point thereafter, with completion of all three blocks expected in September 2023.
6. As part of the works, we completed the sprinkler installation in a 'pilot flat' in Petticoat Tower to give residents the opportunity to see what the installation looks like when finished. Several viewing sessions were held in July and August this year and around 20 residents and members took the opportunity to visit.
7. General feedback from the visits was varied and, we have used the feedback to inform and improve the wider project going forward. In conjunction with our Communications Consultant, PPCR, we continue to develop and update our 'Q & A' documents that we share with residents to help deal with their concerns and answer their questions.
8. We have also installed a sample sprinkler model in a 'pilot flat' on the Avondale Estate, which some members have seen. We still have more work to do on this flat before we offer it to residents for viewing.

9. It has since been agreed that a separate procurement process will be undertaken for the sprinkler installation in Petticoat Tower and, this project will be put out to tender later this month, with an anticipated contract award date of March 2023. A Gateway 5 report will be submitted to the relevant Committees in January next year, seeking approval for the budget.
10. The sprinkler installation at Great Arthur House has been put on hold whilst, a proposal to merge the project with the wider compartmentation works is considered. The application for Listed Building Consent is being updated for submission and, a virtual residents meeting is planned for later this month.

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 Corporation 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).
13. GERDA, our specialist appointed contractor, has now installed the majority of the new upgraded replacement fire doors on the York Way and Holloway Estates (Lot 1), with just a few 'difficult to access' residential and communal doors still to be installed. The Gateway 5 report for the Avondale Estate (Lot 2) is ready to be submitted to the respective Committees for approval but, is currently 'on hold' due to the Capital Programme Review. The tender package for Dron House, Sumner Buildings, and the William Blake Estate (Lot 3) is being finalised and will be released to GERDA shortly to begin the measured survey and costing process.

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 Corporation'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. An updated version of the Action Plan is included at Appendix 1 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 Corporation's housing stock had 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 does, 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, it had previously 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.

20. Following a Corporate procurement exercise, Turner & Townsend (T&T) was appointed to undertake the next round of FRA's for Housing and Barbican. T&T has now completed the Type 3 FRA's for each of our residential blocks of flats on our social housing estates and, has recently submitted its reports. Officers are currently analysing the reports to develop a new Action Plan.

21. It is intended that a report summarising the findings of the FRA's and the subsequent Action Plan, will be presented to the Community & Children's Services Committee at its meeting in December and then on to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee.

Great Arthur House

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. As reported to this Sub-Committee at its last meeting on 8 July, 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

27. 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.

Evacuation Assessments for Vulnerable Residents

28. 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.

29. At its meeting on 14 January 2021, this Sub-Committee received a detailed update report on our progress with the evacuation assessments for vulnerable residents, all of which are now completed. Members were advised that a total of 218 households required an initial assessment under the new procedure. This number is made up of those households on previous 'vulnerable persons' lists and those who requested an assessment following receipt of our letter of July 2021.
30. The assessment involved a discussion with the resident about their individual circumstances and was an opportunity for us to talk about any concerns or additional support needs they may have. During the assessment, officers also explained the action to be taken in an emergency and ensured that the resident understands the fire action policy in force for their respective building. Residents were also offered a referral to the LFB for a home fire safety visit as part of the assessment, and several residents took up the offer.
31. Relevant information has been included in the Premises Information Boxes (PIB) installed across the estates. We have identified 80 residents across all our social housing estates, who have medium/high/critical needs

London Fire Brigade (LFB)

32. 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.
33. Although last year, the LFB carried out several ad-hoc fire safety inspections on City Corporation blocks of flats, there have been no further inspections so far this year.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fire Safety Action Plan

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