

<b>Committee(s):</b> Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee – For Decision	<b>Dated:</b> 9 October 2024
<b>Subject:</b> Fire Safety Update – HRA Properties	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1, 2, 4, 12
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children’s Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> David Blane, Health & Safety Advisor DCCS - Housing	

### 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 Team, is ensuring that its homes on its twelve social housing estates are managed in a way that residents are safe and we comply with current health and safety legislation, best practice, and regulatory standards relating to fire safety

### Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Note, consider, and comment on the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. In July 2017, an initial 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 homes. 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. Further 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 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 Square Estate;
  - Centre Point, Avondale Square Estate;
  - East Point, Avondale Square Estate.
5. Following completion of a compliant, competitive tendering exercise, 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 were subsequently removed from the contract with United Living.
6. Although the retrofitting of sprinklers is a complex and challenging project, we are making good progress with the works as set out below.

#### West Point, Centre Point and East Point – Avondale Square Estate

The successful contractor, United Living are progressing across the 222 properties across the three Avondale Square Point Blocks.

Unfortunately, legal proceedings had to be issued to obtain access to all of the flats. The first available trial date is January 2025.

Despite the intrusive nature of the works, resident satisfaction, gauged from ours and the contractor's in-house surveys has been largely positive, with no "very dissatisfied" scores for any aspects of the work and, only a few "fairly dissatisfied". The issues that caused residents to be 'fairly dissatisfied' were identified and promptly addressed.

### Petticoat Tower – Middlesex Street Estate

The successful contractor, Harmony Fire, commenced on site in mid-October 2023, beginning with pre-condition surveys, site setup, and booking installation appointments with residents. So far only 18 out of the 88 flats have permitted access.

Residents' main objections are the disruption to their home and perceived 'ugly' aesthetics of the works. They are also monitoring the legal dispute at Avondale. In the circumstances the current contract has been suspended to the new year.

To date, communal areas have mechanical rises and controls have been 23 installed on all floors. Textured coating materials that may contain asbestos are being identified and remediated. The main water storage tank for the sprinkler system has been installed.

### Great Arthur House – Golden Lane Estate

Members will be aware from previous reports that the sprinkler installation at Great Arthur House is to be incorporated into a wider compartmentation and fire safety works project. The project team are looking to commission a Fire Strategy for the building before an application for Listed Building Consent can proceed.

## **Fire Doors**

7. As Members will be aware, 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). The Fire Door Replacement Programme, also provides for the installation/upgrade of fire stopping/compartmentation solutions to, for example, penetrations above and through the communal doors and frames (service pipes, service cables etc).
8. GERDA, our specialist appointed contractor, continues to make good progress with the fire door installation programme as set out below.

### Lot 1 – York Way and Holloway Estates

The work in Lot 1, to install new upgraded replacement fire doors (front entrances and communal doors) on the York Way and Holloway Estates is now complete. Customer satisfaction with this project, as gauged from our Customer Satisfaction Surveys, was very high (around 96% satisfied or very satisfied).

### Lot 2 – Avondale Square Estate

All low-level general needs blocks are now complete and have been very well received by residents (as evidenced by the Customer Satisfaction Surveys).

The residential front doors in the three Point Blocks are currently being replaced but the communal doors are on hold until ingoing issues are resolved with the Sprinkler system project. Harman Close communal doors are also on hold as there are cables for door entry system, fire alarm system and warden call lines that have been installed by penetrating the existing doors, which would not allow the existing doors to be removed for replacement. The cabling is scheduled for removal in conjunction with renewal of the warden call and alarm systems.

#### Lot 3 – Sumner Buildings, William Blake Estate, Dron House, Petticoat Tower (communal doors)

Work to Lot 3 is now well underway.

William Blake Estate - all residential doors are complete. There were some communal doors in Blake House that required special testing, this is now complete, and the doors are in fabrication with the subsequent install to take place in due course.

Sumner Buildings - there is one outstanding residential door to be replaced, but we are liaising with the legal department to obtain access.

Dron House- there is one door to be replaced that we were liaising with the legal department. This is now near resolution and will be replaced at the earliest convenience.

Petticoat Tower- we have been unable to replace the communal doors in Petticoat Tower to date due to the sprinkler system project and possible damage to the new doors, while work is ongoing. We are expecting the sprinkler contractor to vacate site shortly which will allow Gerda access to the communal areas. Although space to accommodate a further contractor on Middlesex Street Estate will be of a premium due to the Eastern Base police project, following a productive on-site meeting with Neilcott, the contractors undertaking these works, an amicable agreement has been made for the location of the site set-up required for the tower communal doors to take place.

#### Lot 4 – Southwark Estate, Windsor House, Isleden House, Sydenham Hill Estate, Spitalfields

Reform Architects have been appointed to lead the design work for Lot 4. There will be an initial focus on Sydenham Hill due to the extra complications of the Listing and previous experience of lengthy timescales when dealing with Lewisham. Other Estates within this Lot will also require engagement with the relevant host borough's Local Authority Planning team where residential front doors open onto external balconies.

## Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs)

9. As Members will be aware from the report prepared for its meeting on 2 June 2023, following a corporate procurement exercise, Turner & Townsend (T&T) was appointed to undertake the next round of FRAs for the Corporation's social housing estates.
10. Residential blocks and, where appropriate, associated community centres, have FRA reports, in which observations on key areas found on the day of the assessment were recorded. Areas identified in each of the FRAs are broadly categorised into the following:
  - issues that require immediate remedial action and could be resolved immediately by teams on site;
  - matters requiring contractor intervention;
  - matters that are/will be subject to or incorporated into major works projects.
11. The latest FRAs also refer to positive practices/innovation, acknowledging that some of the Corporation's fire safety and major works improvements projects go beyond the current minimum statutory requirements including, the new fire doors and installation of sprinklers. The FRAs also refer to future considerations and impacts of the introduction of new legislation, regulations, best practice etc.
12. The main themes identified by the latest FRAs undertaken by T&T include:

### Fire doors/fire stopping/compartmentation

The areas highlighted under this category form part of the Corporation's Housing Major Works Programme. The Corporation's Fire Door Replacement Programme incorporates front entrance doors to all flats (including, associated door frames and surrounds), communal fire doors and riser/service cupboard doors (part of the fire stopping and compartmentation work). Work to replace fire doors and improve compartmentation has already been completed on a number of estates and work continues as part of the major works programme, as mentioned previously in this paper. two estates since the FRAs were carried out and, work has also started on several other estates.

### Fire alarms

Any problems identified with existing fire alarms on the day that the FRA survey was carried out, were addressed, and remedied immediately by the on-site estate teams.

The FRAs have identified potential improvements (not statutory) in some of our homes and, in some case, these may be incorporated into future major works projects. One example of this, is the City of London's Almshouses, where it is proposed to carry out a significant upgrade to the existing fire alarm installation, to incorporate both carbon monoxide and environmental monitoring. The enhanced system will also allow for live remote monitoring of alarm activation and faults.

A full pilot system has been installed in one flat. A full scope of the enhanced fire alarm is being undertaken by our contractors, incorporating electrical installation condition reports, to provide full surveying and costs of this project.

### Emergency lighting

Where the FRAs highlighted that whenever emergency lighting systems are to be upgraded/replaced, due consideration must be given to the presence of 'borrowed' external lighting, which may no longer be relied upon to provide sufficient additional lighting to meet the new requirements.

As part of a review of emergency lighting provision across Housing, a paper will be brought forward in due course.

### Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS)/Premises Information Box (PIB)

Although the introduction of PEEPS did not make it into recently introduced legislation as expected, this topic continues to be discussed within several forums at national level. Progress of any potential introduction will continue to be monitored and updates provided to this Committee.

Members will recall from previous reports however, as part of its work to ensure a high standard of fire safety in the homes it manages, 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. Having previously carried out over 220 evacuation assessments of vulnerable residents; relevant information has been included in the Premises Information Boxes (PIB) installed across our estates.

These lists are refreshed every six months or, when new person specific information becomes known. No personal details are included within the list, only their location within the residential block.

### Testing/records

As stated previously, in the case of emergency lighting, a key part of the FRA process is demonstrating that systems and equipment in our blocks of flats are tested as per the required regulatory frequency. In addition to the testing, records are kept demonstrating effective management of both active and passive fire protection.

13. Carrying out FRAs 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 however, specify how often FRAs should be carried out or reviewed. Officers have been working very closely with colleagues in the Corporate Fire Safety team to ensure that FRAs on our housing estates are not only carried out in line with the provisions of the RRO but also, are carried out in accordance with the Corporation's own guidance and best practice.

The table below indicates the number of actions for each Estate as of 9 September 2024. Some Estates have more blocks than others, hence have a higher number attributed to estates and higher number of recorded actions.

The number of identified actions, recorded at the time of assessment, will reduce as issues are categorised as immediate or programmed/project works, and finally the identified action has been completed.

	Total 9 Sept	High	Medium	Low
Avondale Square Estate	363	10	159	194
Golden Lane Estate	106	6	63	37
William Blake Estate	31		5	26
Southwark Estate	86	4	22	60
Sydenham Hill Estate	9		2	7
York Way Estate	100	13	42	45
Middlesex Street Estate	93		35	58
Windsor House Estate	25		13	12
Holloway Estate	42		2	40
Isleden House Estate	40	2	12	24
Alms Houses	8		2	6
Dron House	22		8	14
Total	923	35	365	523

Within each recorded FRA, actions are defined as High, Medium and Low risks.

Example of classified risks are.

High            The self-closer to the Gerda FD60s fire door has been disconnected. It transpires the resident had disconnected the closer so that they could get their mobility scooter into their flat to charge its battery. This has now been reconnected.

- Medium      The location of the two fire hydrants means that the stairways of Block C are more than 100 meters from the hydrant locations.  
The implications of this should be discussed with London Fire Brigade and any remedial action recommended by them should be implemented.
- Low          The Dry Riser Inlets are not signed. As they are not red, they may not be immediately obvious to fire fighters.  
The Dry Riser inlets should be signed in compliance with BS9990.

## **Appendices**

None

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