

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Barbican Residents Consultation Committee Barbican Residential Committee	04 September 2017 11 September 2017
<b>Subject:</b> Fire Safety Update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Community & Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Paul Murtagh Assistant Director Barbican & Property Services	

### Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the City Corporation's approach to fire safety on the Barbican Estate and, following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, to inform Members on the subsequent actions taken by the City Corporation. This report outlines:

- Fire safety measures in place prior to the Grenfell Tower fire;
- Our immediate response to the Grenfell Tower fire;
- The next phase of work to be undertaken;
- Issues for consideration for possible future inclusion in programmes of work.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to note, consider and comment on the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in West London on 14 June 2017, which killed at least 80 people, concerns have, understandably, been raised by City Corporation Members and residents about the safety of our homes and the possibility of a similar incident in one of our tower blocks.
2. Although the cause of the fire, and how it appeared to have spread so quickly, are still being investigated and are unlikely to be confirmed formally for some time, government has already been in contact with local authorities and housing associations, collating information relating to their housing stock and the number and type of residential blocks of flats with six or more floors.
3. It is highly likely that, in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, that new legislation will be introduced to improve fire safety in residential blocks of flats. The City Corporation has 33 residential blocks of flats with six or more floors, 17 of which are on the Barbican Estate. A full list of all the City's blocks of flats with four or more floors is attached as Appendix 'A' to this report.

4. Members are advised that a similar report entitled 'Fire Safety Update', focusing primarily on the City Corporation's social housing stock, has been submitted to, and considered by, the City Corporation's DCCS and Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committees. In addition, this report was also considered by the City Corporation's Audit and Risk Committee. This report focuses primarily on the residential properties on the Barbican Estate.

### **Existing Fire Safety Measures**

5. All the residential blocks on the Barbican Estate have an up-to-date, comprehensive Fire Risk Assessment (FRA). The most recent FRA's were completed in October/November 2016 by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited, a specialist, and accredited consultancy company.
6. Whilst the FRA's do not highlight any particular areas of high risk, they do make a number of medium and low risk recommendations, which were, or are, being addressed through the day-to-day repairs programme or through the Estate Inspection process.
7. Our approach to fire safety is not restricted to undertaking a planned programme of FRA's. We have robust procedures in place to ensure, as far as possible, that our residents on the Barbican Estate remain safe in their homes. These procedures include:
  - Carrying out regular reviews of the FRA's to ensure that they remain valid, compliant and fit-for-purpose;
  - Carrying out inspections of fire doors, emergency lighting and alarms and other related fire safety measures;
  - Carrying out regular estate inspections to ensure that any potential fire and other safety hazards are identified and removed;
  - Providing suitable and regular fire safety and fire risk assessment training for our Barbican Estate Officers, cleaners and concierge staff;
  - Educating our residents and raising awareness of fire safety issues such as evacuation procedures, understanding escape routes and keeping fire escape routes on balconies and walkways clear;
  - Publishing and issuing information relating to fire safety through newsletters and the web site.

### **Immediate Response to the Grenfell Tower Fire**

8. As soon as we became aware of the fire at Grenfell Tower, a number of immediate measures were taken including:
  - Checks on fire escapes, emergency lighting, alarms and other fire safety measures were carried out by BEO staff;
  - A review of the current FRA's to review and reassess the low and medium risks identified;
  - A review of the technical data on all blocks of flats with six or more floors in response to requests for information from the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG). This focused on a number of

issues including the construction of the blocks and the nature and composition of any external cladding;

- A statement issued to all residents reminding them of fire safety advice and reassuring them that none of our residential blocks was of a similar construction to Grenfell Tower;
- A new fire safety leaflet was produced and issued to all Barbican residents which, included information on escape routes, our review of enforcement action and what to do in the event of fire etc;
- Fire safety updates were distributed to residents via our regular bulletins including the development of a 'Frequently Asked Questions' bulletin and a dedicated Fire Safety website page.

### **Decisions Taken as a Result of our Review of Fire Safety**

9. Following a review of our current fire safety processes and procedures immediately after the Grenfell Tower fire, a number of decisions were taken including:

- Commissioning specialist independent future FRA's on all our residential blocks of flats on an annual basis. Previously, in line with best practice and guidance, our policy was to commission independent FRA's every three years, with our own trained staff reviewing them annually. Frankham Risk Management Services Limited has been commissioned to undertake completely new FRA's on all our residential blocks;
- Arranging a series of 'Drop-In' sessions for our residents to discuss with the City Corporation's Senior Managers issues around fire safety, the City Corporation's processes and procedures and its plans for improvements in fire safety in the coming months;
- The majority of entrance doors to individual properties in our blocks are original and, as such, will generally provide notional fire resistance of 15-20 minutes. Whilst there is no legal requirement to replace these doors to provide greater fire resistance, we have done so on our social housing estates as they became due for replacement. However, the decision has been taken to embark on an enhanced front door replacement programme to bring all front entrance doors to individual flats up to 60-minute fire resistance wherever possible. It is intended that our tower blocks will be given priority;
- Barbican Estate staff to respond directly to any requests for advice and guidance in relation to fire safety;
- A much firmer line is being taken with residents who are not complying with guidance on keeping walkways and fire escapes clear.

### **Issues for Further Consideration**

10. In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, it was clear that the City Corporation would need to continue monitor progress with the investigation to understand the causes of the fire any subsequent implications this may have in relation to the safety and integrity of its homes. Due consideration would also need to be given to and resulting legislation or recommendations from government.

11. In anticipation of this, the City Corporation also decided to commission a feasibility study into the potential retro-fitting of fire suppression (sprinkler) systems and fire alarms in its tower blocks.

## **Progress to Date**

### **Fire Risk Assessments (FRA's)**

12. Frankham Risk Management Services Limited has been commissioned to carry out new FRA's for each of our residential blocks. These new FRA's will be very detailed and will cover not only those areas previously inspected, but also any further concerns raised since the Grenfell Tower fire.

13. Work on the new FRA's has now commenced on our social housing estates and it is expected that the new FRA's for the Barbican Estate will be completed by the end of November. Once all the assessments have been completed and submitted to us, they will be analysed by Property Services, Estate Management and the City's Fire Safety Advisor for accuracy and detail. Any urgent recommendations will be addressed immediately and a subsequent detailed Action Plan will be developed to plan, programme and implement all other recommendations as appropriate.

14. A summary report outlining the headline findings from the newly completed FRA's will be presented to your Committee at the earliest opportunity after the Action Plan has been finalised.

15. It is intended that the new FRA's will be made available to Barbican residents through the Fire Safety pages on the City's website. The current FRA's have already been made available here.

16. Work has for some time been well underway in addressing urgent issues and medium risks highlighted by the previous (2016) FRA's carried out by Frankham Risk Management Services Limited and the majority of this work is now completed.

17. We have received a number of very helpful and useful comments from the various House Group Committees in relation to the current FRA's for the Barbican Estate. All of these comments have been logged and recorded by the BEO and have been forwarded to Frankham Risk Management Services Limited for consideration, comment and action.

### **Communication with Residents**

18. Detailed information, in the form of 'Frequently Asked Questions' bulletins, has been produced specifically for each of our estates, including the Barbican Estate. This has been 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. Feedback from residents has been very positive.

19. A further follow-up letter is being sent to residents in September, updating them on actions being taken, and addressing any specific concerns raised since the question and answer sheets were distributed.
20. An informal 'Drop-In' session was arranged and held for Barbican residents on 17 July, which was attended by the Director of Community & Children's Services and the Assistant Director, plus other staff. The session was advertised as an opportunity for any residents with concerns about fire safety to ask questions and talk to senior managers. Attendance was good with between 30 and 40 residents turning up to discuss their concerns and ideas for improvement. It appears that those residents who attended the session found it very useful and expressed their appreciation.
21. The new Fire Safety leaflet that was created and distributed to residents clarifies that the London Fire Brigade (LFB) continues to advise residents to stay in their flat in the event of a fire in their block, but also advising them on what to do if their flat is affected by fire or smoke, or they feel in danger. We hope this will address the confusion that some residents expressed about what to do in the event of a fire.

### **Fire Doors, Sprinkler Systems and Alarms**

22. We have identified a number of front entrance doors from each of our residential blocks of flats, including the Barbican Estate that have been, or will be, sent away to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) for rigorous fire resistance testing. This will give us the information we need in relation to the level of fire resistance these doors and frames currently provide and whether or not that level of fire resistance is adequate. Consequently, we will be able to properly prioritise, plan and cost out our door replacement programme. Priority for testing has been given to our tower blocks.
23. A feasibility study into the potential installation of sprinkler systems in our tower blocks has been commissioned. All the relevant surveys have now been completed and we are now awaiting submission of the final report from our consultant, Butler & Young. We expect to be in a position to present the findings from the feasibility study to Members of this Committee before the end of the calendar year.
24. The London Fire Brigade continues to advise against the installation of fire alarms in communal areas but, this will be reviewed over time as part of the new FRA process.

### **Estate Management**

25. Barbican Estate staff have stepped up 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.

26. The vast majority of residents have understood the need to comply with guidance and have worked with officers to reduce items outside their homes. However, some have been more difficult and have not complied. Having issued notices, given extensive warning and offered help and advice, we are now in a position where we will have no choice but to remove any residents' items which do not meet our Fire Safety Protocol, as agreed by Members. Whilst we are fully entitled to remove any items from communal areas, we do ensure that proper notice is given to residents and items are stored for a period of time to allow owners to collect them.
27. A review of estate walkabouts and checks has been carried out, with a view to improving consistency and monitoring, and to introducing an automated system for recording data and follow up actions.

## **Resources**

28. As Members will appreciate the level of work relating to fire safety that has arisen, and continues to arise, in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire has been unprecedented. The vast burden of this work has fallen on the existing staff within the Housing Property Services and Housing and Barbican Estate Management teams. Staff have responded commendably to the challenge that this considerable amount of extra work has thrown up and their efforts have been reflected in the positive feedback we have received from residents in dealing with, and allaying, their fears in relation to fire safety in their homes.
29. We have recently appointed a new Health and Safety Manager within DCCS, whose main priority is to co-ordinate our work around fire safety with particular focus on the FRA process and the implementation of the resulting Action Plans.
30. It may be prudent at this stage, to alert Members to the potential need for additional resources to ensure that we are able to deal effectively with the fire safety improvement measures that we are considering and have committed to with particular regard to:
- Door replacement programme;
  - Installation of fire suppression systems (sprinklers);
  - Fire safety management planning;
  - Communications and website development.
31. At this stage, until we have the results of the fire resistance testing, feasibility study into sprinklers, completion of the new round of FRA's and information from government in relation to changes in Building Regulations and guidance from the Grenfell Tower enquiry, we are not in a position to properly identify any additional resources that may be required. We will naturally keep Members informed on this matter, and seek the necessary approvals, when we are in a position to do so.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

32. Clearly, as well as the resources issue outlined above, there are further serious financial implications for the City in carrying out the fire safety improvements included and outlined in this report. There will also likely be a financial impact on homeowners on the Barbican Estate if these works are undertaken.
33. The City must also be mindful of the reputational damage should it decide not to take reasonable measures to improve fire safety. The key issue for Members will be to decide what action and expenditure is reasonable and proportionate to the risk.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Table of City of London residential blocks with six or more floors.

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## Appendix 'A'

### City of London residential blocks with 4 or more floors

NAME OF BLOCK	NUMBER OF STOREYS	NUMBER OF FLATS
Centre Point, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	19	75
Colechurch House, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	10	44
East Point, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	19	74
Eric Wilkins House, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	4	20
George Elliston House, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	4	45
Proctor House, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	10	52
Tovy House, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	10	52
Twelve Acres House, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	6	18
West Point, Avondale Square Estate, Old Kent Road, London SE1	19	74
Dron House, Adelina Grove, London E1	4	80
Basterfield House, Golden Lane Estate, London EC1Y	6	22
Bayer House, Golden Lane Estate, London EC1Y	6	14
Bowater House, Golden Lane Estate, London EC1Y	6	14
Cullum Welch House, Golden Lane Estate, London EC1Y	6	72
Great Arthur House, Golden Lane Estate, London EC1Y	15	120
Hatfield House, Golden Lane Estate, London EC1Y	7	22
Petticoat Square, Middlesex Street Estate, London E1 7BS	6	120
Petticoat Tower, Middlesex Street Estate, London E1 7BS	23	81
Collinson Court, Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 1NZ	7	72
Horace Jones House, Duchess Walk, London SE1 2RF	7	43
Stopher House, Webber Street, London SE1	4	60
Sumner Buildings, Sumner Street, London SE1	4	100
Lynton Mansions, William Blake Estate, Hercules Road, London SE1	4	20
Windsor House Wenlock Road, London SE1	4	104
Kinefold House, York Way Estate, London N7 9QD	7	78
Lambfold House, York Way Estate, London N7 9PY	7	80
Penfields House, York Way Estate, London N7 9QA	7	89
Barbican Estate		
Andrews House	11	192
Ben Johnson House	11	204
Breton House	11	111
Bryer Court	11	56
Bunyan Court	11	69

Cromwell Tower	42	112
Defoe House	11	178
Frobisher Crescent	9	69
Gilbert House	11	88
John Trundle Court	11	133
Lauderdale Tower	45	117
Mountjoy House	11	64
Seddon House	11	76
Shakespeare Tower	45	116
Speed House	11	114
Thomas More House	11	166
Willoughby House	11	148