

Fire safety and the Council's response to the Grenfell Tower Tragedy

1. Introduction

This report provides a progress update on Fire Safety issues in Barnet following the report provided to the Housing Committee in October 2017, including progress with implementing a £17.5m package of fire safety improvement works for the council properties managed by Barnet Homes which includes the replacement of cladding at Granville Road.

2. Barnet Council Housing Stock

There are 26 blocks of flats managed by Barnet Homes which have 6 or more floors (or 5 and more floors with a retrospectively fitted cladding system). These blocks have all been inspected by Barnet Homes' fire risk assessors to determine a scope of works to each block. These inspections have included a sample of flats within each block.

As reported to Housing Committee in October 2017, a prioritised programme of works required to move beyond legislative compliance to deliver best practice in fire safety has been developed by Barnet Homes, including consideration of sprinkler systems, improved fire and smoke alarm systems and other measures as set out in the following table:

Category (in order of priority)	Scope	Est. Cost (cumulative)
Granville Road Recladding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement cladding for 3 blocks with ACM panels • Compensation for additional fuel costs for residents at £15 per week per household from October to May inclusive 	£8,122,900
<u>Category 1</u> – High priority works. These works are required to maintain the fire integrity of the building over and above that required by the FRA and to enable an effective response to be provided in the event of a fire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to improve the fire and smoke stopping provisions within buildings (compartmentation) • Replacement of doors to provide a higher level of fire and/or smoke resistance • Provision of increased air ventilation to gas systems in some locations • Some works to provide improved access for emergency services, particularly the LFB 	£9,220,433 (£17,343,333)
<u>Category 2</u> – These elements of work would seek to reduce the time taken to alert people at risk or to provide measures to enable residents to more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade works to replace existing fire detection (alarm) systems within dwellings and linking new systems to central control panels • Some signage works 	£5,781,482 (£23,124,815)

Category (in order of priority)	Scope	Est. Cost (cumulative)
effectively vacate areas at risk. These works would also enable further information to be provided to the LFB in event of a fire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some emergency lighting works • Some elements of smoke ventilation • Some works to provide improved access for emergency services, particularly the LFB 	
<u>Category 3</u> – These elements of works would seek to suppress fires in a more effective manner and minimise the impact of smoke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of sprinkler systems within dwellings within blocks of flats with 10 or more storeys to reflect building regulation requirements for new buildings • Some emergency lighting works • Some smoke ventilation systems 	£10,150,693 (£33,275,505)
<u>Category 4</u> – These works would be considered as beneficial to the block but assuming all Cat 1 and Cat 2 works are undertaken they are unlikely to add any major life preserving benefit. They would however provide further enhancements of fire safety and/or management of the block.	Works included within this category primarily relate to the provision of improved storage facilities for residents.	£627,576 (£33,903,081)

The Housing Committee agreed that Barnet Homes should be instructed to proceed with high priority works (category 1) and the recladding of Granville Road, whilst a final recommendation on additional measures identified (categories 2-4) would be made to the Housing Committee in June 2018 following the anticipated publication of a review of building regulations and fire safety and by Dame Judith Hackitt this Spring.

Delivery of high priority (Category 1) fire safety works

A programme for delivery of Category 1 works has been developed by Barnet Homes which takes into account the complexity and delivery method of the work required at each location, along with the engagement required with residents.

Residents have been written to advising them of the anticipated scope of the works, estimated timescales, next steps and to confirm that leaseholders will not be charged. A full communications plan will be developed for each estate prior to works commencing. The works to all blocks will be completed by end of September 2019.

On some of the regeneration estates the works have been split into two phases to enable earlier commencement of works whilst design works are completed for other

items. Works from the initial phase have already been completed to four blocks and a further seven blocks are scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2018.

Works undertaken to date include;

- Replacement of existing fire doors at Clare, Norden and Whychcote Point on the Whitefield Estate with doors to provide a higher level of fire and smoke resistance, works to the rubbish chutes, works to the basement and installation of new signage.
- Works above the suspended ceiling at Mercury on the Grahame Park Estate.

Survey and design works have been undertaken to Longford Court, Silk House and Shoelands with a view that works will commence on site early in the 2018/19 financial year. Prior to the works commencing a series of drop in surgeries will be held in a venue near to each of the estates when residents will be able to discuss the proposed works with staff and representatives from the consultants.

Cladding of Granville Road

As reported to the Housing Committee on the 23rd October 2017 the cladding system fitted to three tower blocks at Granville Road had been removed. Regular updates have been provided to residents within these blocks as to the progress of this and the implementation of the compensation for increased heating costs.

An options appraisal to consider potential cladding solutions has been undertaken. This has concluded that a rain-screen cladding system consisting of a solid aluminium outer layer that has been subjected to a BRE fire safety test of the whole system should be installed. A series of surgeries with residents are planned for February 2018 to share the outcome of the appraisal, the proposed solution and how the works are to be undertaken. It is anticipated that the recladding works will take place during the 2018/19 financial year and will be completed by Christmas 2018.

Arrangements for compensating residents for additional fuel costs over the winter months associated with the removal of the cladding have been implemented.

3. Registered Providers

As reported previously there are approximately 7,000 homes managed by RPs or Housing Associations in the borough and these are regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), and these are required to carry out fire risk assessments and operate in a similar way to Barnet Homes in managing fire safety in relation to the housing it manages.

The Council wrote to all Housing Associations with 10 or more units and have received responses confirming that eight have blocks of flats over 5 stories in height and that all Housing Associations all of which have up to date fire risk assessments.

Three of the Housing Associations confirmed that they have ACM cladding on blocks, and for all three this has been tested by the Government and failed. One of these (Origin) has received advice from the LFB that the building is safe, and the cladding is

being retested. Another (MHT) is arranging for the cladding to be replaced and a third (Genesis) has already removed the cladding and has a programme to replace it with render only by spring.

In addition, Sanctuary Housing Association has one block which they hold on a lease in Colindale that has failed the testing. There is an up to date fire risk assessment for this block and Sanctuary has stated that the freeholder is responsible any work associated with replacing the cladding. The owner of the building has been contacted by the Council's Building Control Service and confirmed that they have submitted a fire engineer's report to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which recommends that it is not necessary to remove the cladding and are awaiting a response.

4. Private Sector buildings (residential and commercial)

As previously reported to the Housing Committee, in the case of privately owned high rise blocks, the Councils' power to act is limited as whilst Barnet is the planning authority for most new building works, the authority's building control service competes with the private sector for the building compliance work. Additionally, building control services operate strictly within the building regulations and cannot withhold approval on materials that have been tested as suitable, they can only advise.

Owners are required to carry out fire risk assessments and spot checks are carried out by the London Fire Brigade. However, these are restricted checking that fire doors, risers, and alarms are fully functional within the fabric of the building and therefore would not pick up faults in cladding systems or fire compartmentation outside the main structure.

The Council has complied with a request from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to collect and submit data on the status of privately owned high rise blocks exceeding 18 metres in the borough, including whether they have ACM cladding and any actions that owners are taking to address this.

This exercise has provided confirmation that there are 4 privately owned blocks higher than 18 metres within Barnet that have ACM cladding, and a further 3 that require investigation. The Council's Building Control team are liaising with the owners of these buildings to confirm any actions that they are taking and to confirm the status of the 3 blocks where ACM cladding may be present. This includes the building referred to in paragraph 16 above.

In addition to the above, 6 blocks less than 18 metres where ACM cladding is present have been identified. For 3 of these the MHCLG has confirmed that they are low risk and that following inspection by the London Fire Brigade no further action is required.

For the other 3 blocks less than 18 metres, the Council's Building Control team are seeking further information from the owners.

Appendix - Barnet Council Fire Safety Action Plan – Jan 2018

Action	Status	Notes
Council Housing Stock		
Granville Road Towers – cladding removal	Complete	Cladding was removed by early October
Granville Road – identify solution for cladding replacement	On going	Barnet Homes working with contractors and consultants. Consultation with residents on proposed solution February 2018
Granville Road – installation of new cladding system	On going	To commence spring 2018 and fully complete by Winter 2018 Residents to be compensated for additional fuel costs
Complete surveys of all council tower blocks to identify best practice options	Complete	Update to Housing Committee 23 October
Undertake high priority works identified in surveys	On going	Additional resources agreed by Housing Committee and Policy and Resources Committee. Programme now underway
Finalise package of additional measures	On going	Await outcome of Govt. Review of Fire Safety and Building Regulations Spring 2018. Report to Housing Committee in June 2018
Registered Providers (RPs)		
Contact RPs for confirmation that their Fire Risk Assessments are up to date and to identify any high rise blocks they managed within the borough	Complete	All have responded and confirmed location of building and that FRAs are up to date.
Work with Government and RPs to ensure actions to address any fire safety concerns are addressed.	On going	3 RPs have confirmed they have blocks with ACM panels that have failed tests and they are planning to remove these. More details requested.
Private Sector Residential and Non-residential		
Issue briefing note for owners and managing agents of private sector buildings	Complete	Advice note produced and sent to owners 26 June 2017
Publicise letter from Government for private sector owners offering assistance with cladding	Complete	Place link on Council web site Include reference in briefing note
Identify private dwellings in the borough potentially at risk	Ongoing	10 sites identified– information on mitigations requested from owners.
Complete data collection exercise and submit to Government	Ongoing	Initial returns made. Additional information being sought from owners for blocks where ACM present.
Council non- residential		
Barnet House -complete actions from fire risk assessment	Complete	All actions will be completed by July 2017
Colindale – new council headquarters – fires safety strategy	Complete	Strategy in place
Actions from fire risk assessments for commercial units beneath residential	On going	All retailers have been contacted to confirm works required. Enforcement action will be taken where appropriate.