

# Fire safety and the council's response to the Grenfell Tower Tragedy

## Briefing for Housing Committee October 2018

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update on fire safety issues in Barnet, including progress with implementing a £30m package of fire safety improvement works for the council properties managed by Barnet Homes which includes the replacement of cladding at Granville Road, as well as proposals for taking forward additional works following the publication of the final review of building regulations and fire safety and by Dame Judith Hackitt. The package includes those works approved by the Housing Committee in October 2017 and in June 2018.
- 1.2 Further work is currently underway to consider additional investment in fire safety works for low and medium rise council flats, and the outcome of this will be reported to Housing Committee in January 2019.

### 2.0 Barnet Council Housing Stock

- 2.1 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). Within the 26 blocks, 12 blocks have 10 or more floors. All 26 blocks have been inspected by Barnet Homes' fire risk assessors to determine a scope of works to each building. These inspections have included a sample of flats within each block.
- 2.2 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 table at the end of this report;
- 2.3 The Housing Committee of October 2017 agreed that Barnet Homes should be instructed to proceed with high priority works (category 1) and the recladding of Granville Road, whilst a 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.
- 2.4 The committee in June 2018 approved the following updated proposals bringing the total investment in fire safety works to £30m.

2.5

Granville Road cladding removal, recladding and associated costs	£8,122,900
Category 1 works	£9,220,433
Additional fire safety works to high rise buildings (Category 2 and 3a works)	£12,656,667
<b>Total</b>	<b>£30,000,000.00</b>

2.6 Granville Road Towers Cladding System

2.7 A comprehensive piece of work was undertaken by Barnet Homes to determine the best replacement product. A system which had been tested to BR135 standard was selected and works to install this commenced in April 2018. The system makes use of solid aluminium panels and is non-combustible exceeding the requirements of the current building regulations and clarifications issued by the government following the Grenfell Tower fire. The works are progressing well and are ahead of schedule. The cladding and removal of the mast climbers to all three blocks is scheduled to be completed during October 2018, one month ahead of schedule. There will then be some remedial works at low level to be undertaken.

2.8 An application for government grant funding was submitted in August 2018 following the publication of the guide as to how to apply, by the MHCLG. An application for £5m of grant funding has been submitted, and the outcome is awaited. There are further costs of around £900k which are not eligible for grant funding, including the provision of fire wardens and other temporary measures prior to cladding removal. The total project cost is estimated to be in the region of £5.9m. This represents a saving of around £2.2m against the initial estimate. The primary contributory factors to this saving are:

- Following testing and inspection the existing support rails on the structure could be retained
- A reduced project timescale has resulted in lower access costs and overheads
- Directly contracting with a cladding specialist for delivery of works
- The non-expenditure of the assigned contingency sum.

## 2.9 Delivery of high priority (Category 1) fire safety works

2.10 Significant progress has been made on the delivery of the high priority (Category 1) works agreed by the Housing Committee in October 2017, together with a broader range of fire safety measures. A summary of the achievements to date are:

- The establishment of a dedicated fire safety team to lead on and deliver fire safety works and measures to high rise blocks
- Delivery of a range of fire safety measures at various locations, including:
  - Works above the dropped ceilings on the Grahame Park Estate and replacement of fire doors
  - Works to the high-rise blocks on the Whitefields estate. These have included upgrade works to the bin chutes, installation of new fire doors and signage works
  - The commencement of works at Silk House and Shoelands Court
  - Design works at Longford Court have been prepared and the contractor is now seeking costs for the works from potential supply chain partners. A meeting with the LFB to discuss the updated scope of works took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018. A series of drop-in surgeries for residents with examples of the proposed works are due to take place in October 2018

- Detailed design surveys continue to be undertaken to other high-rise blocks across the borough and tender documents for these works are being prepared.
- FRA's to all high-rise blocks were reviewed in light of the Grenfell Tower fire and regular ongoing inspections of high rise blocks have continued.
- The undertaking of home visits to all residents in high rise blocks to understand their current make up and needs is in progress. This will enable better information to be shared with the LFB in the event of an emergency.
- Increased communications with residents on fire safety through regular information in At Home, targeted letters to specific locations and use of social media.

### **3.0 Further developments – low & medium rise blocks**

- 3.1 The government's Independent review of building regulations and fire safety, which was published earlier this year, focused initially on multi-occupancy higher risk residential buildings (HRRB's) that are 10 storeys or more in height. However, it is important to recognise that fire safety is not just a matter limited to high rise homes. Of the 9,900 flats managed by Barnet Homes 660 are in blocks of flats with 10 or more floors.
- 3.2 Using the previous definition adopted by Barnet Homes and LBB (6 or more floors, or 5 or more floors with a retrospective cladding system) less than 1,400 homes are included.
- 3.3 Whilst the Regulatory Reform (Fire safety) Order 2005 focuses on communal areas, Barnet Homes have piloted some surveys which go over and above these requirements and include areas within dwellings. Within some properties areas for further improvements have been identified of a similar nature to that of the high-rise properties.
- 3.4 It was recommended to the Housing Committee in June 2018 that consideration be given to extending the fire safety programme to include low and medium rise flats. Barnet Homes have considered options for this, however there is further work to be undertaken in this regard to develop a fuller set of recommendations.
- 3.5 There is also a need to review the existing stock investment programme and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan ensure there is capacity within the budget. It is, therefore, intended that a set of proposals for low and medium rise blocks will be presented at the January 2019 Housing Committee alongside the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan update.

### **4.0 Further developments – Fire doors**

- 4.1 On the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018 the government released a statement regarding potential issues identified with door-sets produced by the company Manse Masterdoor. Further testing of these doors was undertaken and an updated statement made on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018. An excerpt of this statement is as follows:
- 4.2 *“The expert panel has concluded there is a performance issue with these Manse Masterdoor fire doors, which do not consistently meet the 30-minute fire resistance*

*standard. Nevertheless, the National Fire Chiefs Council has advised the expert panel the risk to public safety remains low”*

- 4.3 The government has since issued further statements with the most recent being on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018. This named a further four manufacturers whose doors have performance issues. It is understood that the government has now ceased the testing of further composite door-sets on the basis that there is a widespread issue with their performance. Composite door-sets have been widely used within the private and social housing sectors. It is also understood that most composite door manufacturers have suspended the production of these whilst further design development and testing is undertaken to develop products that fully comply with or exceed the required standard.
- 4.4 There are around 5,000 composite fire doors installed to homes managed by Barnet Homes. In line with the government advice, the fire risk assessments to all blocks with these doors are being reviewed.
- 4.5 Discussions have commenced with contractors who have supplied and fitted these fire doors and legal advice has been sought.
- 4.6 It is estimated that the total cost of replacing these doors would be around £10.5m. This includes costs for managing the works of replacing the door-sets and other associated costs. It should be noted that given the nationwide suspension of the production of composite fire doors, the replacement cost assumes the use of timber door-sets, however it is likely that the industry supplying these will see significant demand which may adversely affect the cost of these products. A further update on this will be provided to the January 2019 Housing Committee.
- 4.7 In the event the review of any fire risk assessment confirms urgent replacement is required, this will be funded through existing budget provisions in the short term.
- 4.8 As far as is possible Barnet Homes are seeking to gain agreement from contractors who installed these doors to replace them at their own cost. However, at this stage no agreement has been reached and there remains the risk of the council needing to cover the cost of these door sets whilst legal disputes are ongoing.

## **5.0 Further developments – Sprinklers to high rise blocks with 10 or more floors and two or more stairwells**

- 5.1 It was recommended to the Housing Committee in June 2018 that sprinklers be installed to high rise blocks with 10 or more floors and a single stairwell. This recommendation was agreed.
- 5.2 The paper also proposed that consideration be given to installing sprinklers in blocks of 10 or more floors and two or more stairwells, however this should be considered as part of further measures including the works to low and medium rise blocks, and it is intended that a recommendation on this matter will be presented to Housing Committee in January 2019.

## **7. Registered Providers**

- 7.1 As reported previously there are approximately 7,000 homes managed by RPs or Housing Associations in the borough and these are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). RPs 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.

- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 One of these (Origin) has received advice from the LFB that the building is safe, and a replacement cladding that has passed fire safety tests will be fitted early in 2019.
- 7.5 Metropolitan Housing Trust has approved the removal of the existing ACM cladding on Desmond House and also its replacement with non-combustible terracotta tiles and render. This has now got both planning permission and in principle building control approval. The remaining design process is almost complete and the tendering process for the works is also nearing completion. Additional works being carried out include the replacement of all doors and windows and the addition of a sprinkler system.
- 7.6 Genesis has now completed the replacement of ACM cladding on their high-rise stock in Barnet.
- 7.7 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. Earlier this year, the owner of the building was contacted by the council 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. The owners of the building have recently advised that they have been told that they do not need to remove the cladding, and the council is seeking confirmation of this from the MHCLG.

## **8. Private Sector buildings (residential and commercial)**

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.

- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 Following this exercise, it has been confirmed that there are 2 privately owned blocks higher than 18 meters within Barnet that have ACM cladding which has failed the governments fire safety tests, including the building referred to in paragraph 7.7 above, and the council is in ongoing dialogue with the building owners and the MHCLG about remediation of the cladding.
- 8.5 On 17 May 2018 the Secretary of State issued a direction requiring all local authorities to take particular regard of the Government's consolidated advice on the hazards associated with the use of ACM cladding on high-rise buildings, to take appropriate steps to identify and notify the government of all high rise residential buildings in their area with a view to identifying any action that may be required under the Housing Act 2004, and to carry out a review to consider any fire safety hazards arising out of the use of ACM cladding on these buildings. A copy of the direction is appended to this report (Appendix 2).
- 8.6 The Government has announced that it will also give local authorities further levers to speed up identification and ensure remediation of unsafe cladding in the private sector later this year.
- 8.7 To ensure that the council is compliant with the Government's direction, the council has carried out a review of cladding and fire safety in relation to high rise residential buildings in the borough and is satisfied that the approach it has taken is appropriate.