

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

Briefing for Housing Committee April 2019

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2017, a significant fire occurred in Grenfell Tower, a block of flats owned by Kensington and Chelsea and managed by their Tenant Management Organisation. The fire spread rapidly through the building and resulted in 72 deaths.
- 1.2 This report provides an update of progress in addressing fire safety issues across the Housing Stock in Barnet, including Council Housing, Housing Association properties and the Private Sector.

2 Council Housing

- 2.1 The Housing Committee in June 2017 considered how to respond to this tragic event and what measures could be implemented to high rise properties owned by Barnet Council and managed by Barnet Homes to ensure such an event would not be repeated. The committee approved a recommendation, amongst others, that the approach to fire safety be reviewed to move from legislative compliance to one of best practice.
- 2.2 The consideration of the matter over subsequent meetings of the Housing Committee has enabled a well thought out approach to be taken as to how the commitment of moving to best practice should be implemented and also to enable recommendations made by the London Fire Brigade and the Government to be considered, costed and programmed for implementation.
- 2.3 The Housing Committee has agreed the following investment programme to improve fire safety in council housing:

Item	Cost
Granville Road cladding removal, recladding and associated costs	£5,922,900
Category 1 High Priority works	£9,220,433
Additional fire safety works to high rise buildings (Category 2 and 3a works)	£12,656,667
Installation of sprinklers to High Rise blocks with 2 stairwells	£3,220,000
Installation of sprinklers to sheltered housing blocks	£2,330,000

Installation of sprinklers to hostels	£150,000
Works to low and medium rise blocks (inc. undertaking of type 3 FRA's and any urgent arising works)	£7,900,000
Replacement of composite fire doors	£10,500,000
Total	£51,900,000

Progress on fire safety measures to date

Granville Road Recladding

- 2.4 The works to replace the cladding system have progressed well and replacement works are now complete.

Category 1 High Priority Works

- 2.5 Good progress has been made on the delivery of high priority works. This has included works to the communal areas of high rise blocks on Whitefields, Granville Road and Grahame Park. Works have commenced on site at Silk House, Shoelands, Nant Court and Mountfield.
- 2.6 Some of the high priority works have been included within packages of additional works that are to be tendered. This is because combining the works together will provide a better long term solution and enable the works to be coordinated with more disruptive works such as the installation of sprinkler systems.

Additional fire safety works (category 2 and 3a)

- 2.7 Surveying and design works have been undertaken to Longford Court. Following the agreement at the January 2019 Housing Committee to the approach to leaseholders, leasehold consultation has now commenced at this location. In addition, non-statutory consultation with tenants has also commenced. A short information booklet has been posted to all flats and drop in sessions were held for residents to discuss the proposed works on the 19th and 20th March. Once the first stage of leasehold consultation has been completed tender documents will be finalised and a tender exercise to appoint a suitable works contractor will be completed. The tender documents will also include the remaining high priority works. Meetings with the LFB to discuss the proposed works have also taken place. It is planned that before works commence on site a further series of resident drop in sessions will be held.
- 2.8 Surveying and design works have been undertaken at Norfolk Close and Prospect Ring. Leasehold consultation at this location has also commenced. Following a similar methodology to that being used at Longford Court, non-statutory consultation with tenants will be undertaken and a series of drop in information sessions held for residents, these are due to take place on the 26 March and the 2 April 2019.
- 2.9 Barnet Homes have commissioned a series of 4 fire safety videos (each being around 3 minutes long). These cover different topics and will be used through

new tenant sign ups, our social media platforms and web sites to encourage further engagement and to further raise awareness of fire safety actions and behavioural change. These are scheduled to be completed in early April 2019.

Installation of sprinklers to blocks of flats with 10 or more floors and 2 or more stairwells

2.10 These works will form part of the 5-year programme and these are currently scheduled for 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years

Installation of sprinklers to sheltered housing blocks and hostels

2.11 These works will form part of the 5-year programme and these are currently scheduled for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years

Works to low and medium rise blocks (inc. undertaking of type 3 FRA's and any urgent arising works)

2.12 The development of tender documents for the appointment of specialists to undertake the type 3 FRA's during the 2019/20 financial year is underway.

Flat Front Entrance Fire Doors

2.13 Following an issue highlighted by the Metropolitan Police as part of their investigation into the Grenfell Tower Fire, the Government undertook testing on "glass reinforced polyester" (GRP) composite fire doors, and have since extended their testing to timber door-sets. The initial government statement on GRP doors was made in March 2018 and a further statement been made in May 2018. There are around 5,000 affected doors to homes managed by Barnet Homes.

2.14 There are around 5,000 composite fire doors installed to homes managed by Barnet Homes. The MHCLG recommended that property owners reviewed and updated their fire risk assessments for blocks which have GRP composite fire doors. This task has been completed for all Barnet Homes blocks and the findings of these are being reviewed.

2.15 Discussions are ongoing with contractors who have supplied and fitted these fire doors and legal advice has been sought. The basis of an agreement to replace the doors over a two -year period has been agreed.

2.16 The MHCLG have now commenced testing of timber door-sets and these have been more successful in test conditions.

Willow House Fire

2.17 there was a fire at Willow House in East Finchley that occurred around midnight on the 7 November 2018 that caused significant damage to the roof over flats 1-12, with part of the roof collapsing. Although the fire damage was largely limited to the roof and the top floor flat of origin, significant water damage has been caused to all 13 flats in the block, resulting in the need to rehouse residents.

- 2.18 Barnet Homes have appointed a consultant and structural engineer to survey the building and to develop a schedule of works required to reinstate the building. This process has progressed well and information to enable contractors to submit bids to undertake the works has been uploaded to Barnet Homes procurement portal. Subject to successful tendering, it is anticipated that works will be completed in Autumn 2019.

Large Panel System Buildings

- 2.19 There have been various reports in the media of issues around high-rise Large Panel System Buildings (LPS). These have included some landlords decanting residents from high rise blocks which use this form of construction whilst further strengthening works are undertaken. Barnet Homes manage four locations with LPS type construction blocks of flats, however none of these blocks are tower blocks. The tallest block being six floors high and the majority being four floors or less. Barnet Homes have undertaken surveys of LPS blocks on the West Hendon Estate and at Silk House, with more planned to ensure sufficient coverage in line with Building Research Establishment guidelines. Surveys are also planned to the remaining blocks with 5 floors on the Dollis Valley Estate.
- 2.20 These surveys take a significant amount of time to undertake and are being carried out in a phased manner. To facilitate the surveys a small number of residents are being temporally rehoused from certain flats as the surveying requires the removal of decorative finishes and then the exposing of steel reinforcement bars within the buildings structure.
- 2.21 As the surveys are completed Barnet Homes will consider further steps that may be required in consultation with the Council and residents.

3 Housing Associations

- 3.1 Approximately 7,000 homes in Barnet are managed by Housing Associations and these are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). As Registered Providers, they 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 they manage.
- 3.2 The council has received confirmation that housing associations with high rise blocks in the borough all have up to date fire risk assessments, and that a small number of these that failed government safety tests have been or are being dealt with.

4 Private Sector

- 4.1 In the case of privately owned high rise blocks, 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.
- 4.2 Owners are required to carry out fire risk assessments and spot checks are carried out by the London Fire Brigade. However, these are restricted to 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.
- 4.3 Two high rise blocks in the private sector have been identified as having failed government tests for ACM cladding. The council's building control team have sought information from the owners of these buildings on remediation measures that they are taking.
- 4.4 To ensure compliance with a government direction on fire safety issued in May 2018, the council has carried out a review of cladding and fire safety in relation to high rise private residential buildings in the borough.
- 4.5 The Government has also issued an addendum to the Housing Health and Safety Regulations, which confirms local authority powers to take action against owners of high rise buildings in the private sector, and the council will make use of these where necessary.