

Item 5	Date: 13 July 2017	To: Overview and Scrutiny committee
Report title:	Fire safety	
From:	Gerri Scott, Strategic Director of Housing and Modernisation	

1. Overview and Scrutiny committee (OSC) is asked to note the contents of this report.

Context

2. Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington, in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on 14th June 2017, officers provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) with a verbal report on the 19th June about the council's position in relation to fire safety issues and particularly the fire safety measures that had been put in place since the terrible fire at Lakanal House in 2009.
3. Officers also provided responses to questions from committee members and Tenants Council members who were in the audience.
4. At that meeting, OSC agreed seven recommendations and these are set out below:
 - i. That the cabinet member orders a review of council high rise blocks in Southwark to ascertain the need for and cost of fitting sprinkler systems and any other fire safety measures in those buildings. OSC assumes wider government guidance will be given but this review should not be delayed while that guidance is forthcoming. We encourage Tenant Council to submit a letter to the cabinet member setting out any further representations on fire safety measures, and this should form part of the review
 - ii. The cabinet member should consider making all fire risk assessments for high rise flats above 7 floors public via the council's web site
 - iii. The cabinet member should encourage TRAs to hold local meetings with fire fighters to review their fire evacuation arrangements and check that access routes are clear.
 - iv. The cabinet member consults with Tenant Council in order to find appropriate representatives to accompany officers on site visits where testing of cladding and building materials is taking place.
 - v. The council reviews best practice and current procedure around fire safety relating to scaffolding used on council buildings
 - vi. That the appropriate cabinet member reviews internal guidance documents in respect of both new build and refurbishment projects to ensure they are up to sufficient standard in respect of fire safety.

- vii. That the leader and the cabinet member lobby the government to investigate and respond to the cause of the Grenfell fire quickly and provide funding for fire safety solutions.

Progress against OSC recommendations

5. Progress against each of the recommendations is set out below:

- i. The council has engaged the services of an industry expert independent consultancy, BB7, to undertake an independent fire risk management audit and a top down review of the council's fire safety processes and procedures. This will include a comprehensive audit of Southwark Council's fire risk Management System and an audit of the organisations fire risk assessment programme. BB7 will undertake an audit following a systematic, independent and documented process for obtaining evidence and evaluating it objectively to determine the extent to which the organisation complies with the requirements of legislation and national guidance.

The review will consider a mix of each type of location, along with a cross section of storeys and unit size and will include hostels, travellers sites, sheltered housing schemes, barrow stores, flat conversions and purpose built blocks ranging from low rise to the highest rise.

The sample locations will be selected randomly by BB7 and will comprise 36 locations in total. BB7 will undertake this work throughout August 2017 and will report back to the council through OSC in September 2017.

The Director of Communities is also establishing an independent resident advisory group to undertake a resident scrutiny review of how the council safeguards residents against the risk of harm due to a fire incident. This will be a task and finish group of no more than 10 residents that will gather evidence on

- the council's policies and procedures relating to fire safety.
- how fire safety is promoted to residents.
- what information residents are given on fire safety and the importance of issues such as keeping communal areas and corridors clear from obstructions.
- fire prevention, detection, warning and escape measures.

The Group will identify issues of concern to residents and make recommendations for addressing these.

- ii. Arrangements are in place for new FRAs for all blocks of seven storey and above to be available on the council's website. These will be available in the latter part of August 2017.

The council has a rolling programme of FRAs and performance for completion of these within target time is included in the departmental performance monitor which is reviewed on a monthly basis by the Housing and Modernisation departmental management team, and also by the Cabinet Member for Housing. Performance is currently green with 100% of FRAs completed within target time.

However, in view of the current fire safety concerns, the Fire Safety Team, irrespective of when the last FRA was carried out, has been asked to carry out a new FRA for each of our 174 tower blocks, together with the Repairs Compliance Team, so that any follow on repair issues can be immediately ordered.

At the same time, resident services officers will continue to carry out frequent checks of these blocks to address any management issues such as, dumped rubbish, obstructed access or general clutter.

This recommendation is being taken forward by the directors of asset management and resident services, Dave Markham and Paul Langford.

- iii. An initial meeting with Tenants and Residents Associations and members of the public took place on Monday 26th June, 7pm, hosted by the Fire Brigade, at the Old Kent Road fire station. Attendance was estimated at approximately 40 people.

Many issues and concerns were discussed, but most focussed on externally run gas pipework, stay put principles, smoke and fire detection, and compartmentation issues. It should be noted that the stay put policy was reaffirmed by LFB.

A separate issue regarding fire compartmentation in the Ledbury Tower Blocks was raised at that meeting and the council and the LFB response is covered in Appendix A to this report.

In the last few weeks, the Fire Safety team has been asked to attend numerous TRA meetings to give overview presentations on fire safety issues. These meetings will be publicised widely at estate level to provide local residents, over and above those involved in their TRA, with an opportunity to discuss fire safety issues. The dates for these meetings have been shared with the LFB so they can attend.

This recommendation is being taken forward by the director of communities, Stephen Douglass.

- iv. At the OSC meeting on 19th June, OSC members and representatives of Tenants Council expressed concern at the likely time it would take to test the cladding found at 4 low rise council blocks through the Department of Communities and Local Government's testing mechanism. In addition, the guidelines only require blocks 7 storeys and above, or higher than 18 metres, with cladding to be tested through this central government route, so the four blocks in Southwark's council housing stock would not comply.

Irrespective of the central government guidelines, where we identify any cladding on council blocks, we would want to be assured that the materials used would not compromise the safety of residents.

At the OSC meeting, there was a request from one member that the council should consider how residents could be involved in the independent verification of the testing of any cladding. Rather than delay the testing of samples by considering how to involve residents, the strategic director of housing and modernisation took the decision to send samples of the cladding from the four council blocks for testing to Bureau Veritas, a testing agency approved by the

LFB. Bureau Veritas were able to accept the panels immediately and as this is work commissioned and carried out by experts and not directly involving council officers, the strategic director advised the Chair of Tenants Council of this decision the same day.

The report has concluded that the exterior surfaces for Canute are robust and will withstand a fully involved compartment fire without spreading across the external surface.

Medina which is under 18 metres in height and compliant with building regulations will in the opinion of Bureau Veritas withstand a small fire in the building without spreading across the external surface of the building. In the event of a fully involved compartment fire the external surface of the cladding is likely to prevent the spread of fire. If the insulation material is exposed to that fully involved fire there is a possibility for fire spread across the face of the building. The report states that provided the insulation is sealed within the stainless steel facings there is likelihood that the insulation will remain completely protected. According to my surveyors it was and contractors who have been sent direct to site to check this have confirmed this.

We have checked the insulation on Medina House and it is sealed within the stainless steel facings, however we are going to take a 'belt and braces' approach and are carrying out a more thorough survey this week. We think that we should go over and beyond the current building regulations and are considering removing the panel system and replacing it with a fascia which is compliant with the regulations required for higher buildings.

- v. Officers have carried out an initial review of fire safety relating to scaffolding and can report as follows:

Essentially, contractors have comprehensive measures in place for managing the risk of fire in respect of their own operations during the course of their normal working day. However, these do not extend and are beyond the control of activities of building's occupants, particularly out of normal hours.

It is accepted that stringent measures are implemented and maintained to manage the risk of fire relative to scaffolding erected around occupied residential buildings. Going forward however, officers will consider the following areas in order to further reduce any residual risk:

- a) Traditional scaffolding (as is most commonly used on the Council's buildings) involves the use of timber boarding to form the working landings. Although this material is combustible, because of its type and composition, its flash-point and subsequent spread of fire, is low.

With industry developments, the use of metal boarding systems to form working landings is now a viable option available on the market that might be considered. It is cost effective but unfortunately is only suited to conventional building shapes, though it can be combined with traditional scaffolding for irregular shaped structures.

- b) Debris netting – that low or non-combustible products should always be the preferred option used by contractors.

- vi. A working group has been set up led by the Development Delivery Manager which will review the processes and procedures developed for the new build programme. This will include the overarching design standards for the new build programme, the detailed employers requirements, and bespoke procedures for the programme. In addition, the review will consider whether allowances will need to be made for future proofing developments to take into account potential changes in legislation, and will review the proposed on site quality control regime and whether additional resources are required to enhance this area.

A report will be prepared for the Lead Cabinet Members for Housing and Regeneration and New Homes by the end of August 2017.

A working group has been set up led by the Head of Investment to review current refurbishment specifications. The group will include technical staff, project managers and Fire Safety Team representatives and a draft report will be prepared for a wider group of managers in Asset Management and then the final report for the Lead Cabinet member for Housing by the end of August.

In addition to the above, officers also ensure that reviews are carried out of contractors' fire safety training and competence, and that they are up to expected standards and levels.

Officers will consider the fire safety of other high rise blocks across the borough and will request and review the fire risk assessments from housing association providers in the borough.

- vii A letter from the Leader of the Council and Deputy leader and Cabinet Member for Housing has been sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. This is included at Appendix B.