

<b>5</b>	<b>Date:</b> 11 September 2017	<b>To:</b> Overview and Scrutiny committee
<b>Report title:</b>	Ledbury Estate Update	
<b>From:</b>	Gerri Scott, Strategic Director of Housing and Modernisation	

## Recommendation

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

## Background

2. As reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 13 July 2017 in response to the issues raised by the tragic Grenfell Tower Fire, the council and the LFB jointly held a residents' meeting to listen to and respond to concerns about fire safety on Monday 26 June 2017. At that meeting, a resident reported large cracks in their flat in one of the four 14 storey towers (Bromyard, Peterchurch, Skenfrith and Sarnsfield) on the Ledbury estate, expressing concern that these cracks breached the compartmentation of the flat and therefore compromised fire safety. There are 224 properties in total, 75 one bedroom, 72 two bedroom and 76 three bedroom.
3. The blocks are large panel system construction, built by Taylor Woodrow between 1968 and 1970 and are former GLC properties which transferred to Southwark Council in 1982.
4. Following that meeting, the Strategic Director of Housing and Modernisation (SDHM), contacted the resident by email to arrange a visit by the Fire Safety team to inspect the cracks. The Fire Safety team carried out an inspection of the resident's flat on 29 June 2017 when it became clear that the gaps were significant. This raised concerns about the structural integrity of the block, and the other three tower blocks as well as the fire safety of the residents.
5. A new fire risk assessment was carried out on 30 June 2017 and the LFB were informed. The LFB carried out their own assessment of the tower blocks on the same day which required the council to put in place a number of remedial measures, all of which were designed to ensure that residents could remain in their homes during the investigative surveys and the temporary repairs to seal the breaches in compartmentation. These included:
  - Walking Wardens (one per two floors) hired from a private company to walk the floors during twelve hour shifts (two shifts per day). This is co-ordinated from Tenants and Resident Hall (Control Centre) by Southwark Council staff to ensure that the brief is complied with in full.
  - Each block has one person designated to call 999 to inform the Control Centre of any potential issues. This person has overall control of the wardens in the block. The instruction to the Wardens is that in the event of a fire anywhere in the block they are to alert the residents and assist them to leave the block. There is no longer a 'stay put' strategy applied to the estate we are now working to a simultaneous evacuation strategy. In an emergency, priority will be given to those on the floor of a fire and initially those on the floors above the fire.

- Communication between all Wardens via radios and between the Control Centre and the Head Warden and between Head Wardens for each block. The maximum distance from a front entry door to the staircase is @six metres and there are four flats per floor.
  - Ongoing work to seal any gaps between flats.
  - Inspections to all fire doors to ensure they are thirty minutes fire resistant and have appropriate self closing devices. If there is any doubt regarding the validity of a 'notional' door it will be replaced.
  - A 'zero tolerance' approach to all items in the common areas to include doormats and pot plants.
  - All flats have enhanced LD2 part 6 fire alarm system meaning we have coverage to all rooms in the flats except the bathrooms. All flats were checked to ensure their fire alarm is in full working order
  - Initial inspections undertaken by a Senior Building Surveyor and our Senior Fire Surveyor indicated there are no potential breaches between the dwellings and the escape routes and that the escape routes are fully protected. This building has no cladded materials.
  - An interim fire alarm system covering the common areas at every landing.
6. All of these measures were fully complied with and as long as they remain, pending a permanent solution to the compartmentation issues, residents will not need to leave their homes.
7. A team of technical staff started to assess all of the flats within the four tower blocks from Thursday 29 June. Contractors were appointed to carry out remedial works and continued to do so over the weekend and into the following weeks.
8. Arup, the leading civil engineering firm, were commissioned on Friday 30 June and started work on Monday 3 July. They carried out internal investigations to 4 flats, three occupied and one empty, and also erected a tower scaffold to the exterior of the building to inspect the structure externally.
9. Arup wrote to the Director of Asset Management, on 5 July 2017 to advise that,
- 'Arup engineers have found no structural safety issues but are continuing to investigate and will make recommendations for remediation work if required'*.
10. The LFB Borough Commander wrote to residents of the four tower blocks on 5 July 2017 to advise them of the ongoing dialogue between the council and the LFB and the appropriateness of the council's measures in view of the compartmentation measures as below:
- 'Southwark Council then took the precaution of placing fire wardens on each floor of each of the blocks and briefed them to evacuate the entire block should a fire occur. Needless to say this is contrary to the LFB policy of 'stay put' but entirely appropriate if there are doubts regarding the compartmentation of a building.*
- In addition to the implementation of briefed fire wardens a range of other measures have been actioned that add to your safety in regard to early detection of fire, keeping means of escape clear and protected and evacuation protocols. Arrangements are being made to secure long term solutions and rest assured that the enhanced measures currently in place on the Ledbury Estate, will not be lifted until these solutions are satisfactorily actioned'.*

11. Communications to residents have been ongoing. A control centre has been set up in the Ledbury estate TRA Hall. This hall has been constantly staffed by council staff since Friday 30 June. Each block was given its own Resident Services Officer, and the TRA hall was and is being staffed by officers from the council 24/7. It also provides rest centre facilities for the fire marshals and contractors who have been working on site.
12. The SDHM sent letters all residents of the four tower blocks on Friday 30 June, Saturday 1 July, Monday 3 July and Wednesday 5 July. These have been hand delivered to residents, together with the letter from the LFB and update from Arup.
13. A dedicated website [www.southwark.gov.uk/ledburytowers](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/ledburytowers) was set up where all information has been posted. Copies of FRAs are available on this website, although these are live documents because of the current compartmentation issues and are being constantly updated. Ward councillors and the Chair of Ledbury TRA have received regular updates.
14. Arup engineers provided an overview presentation about the structural issues and answered residents' questions at the Ledbury Estate TRA AGM on Tuesday 11th July 2017, and the venue was located at the Camelot School to provide sufficient capacity for attendees.
15. At the time the long-term solution for the tower blocks was to address the compartmentation issues. The current remedial works being carried out are temporary measures to provide compartmentation. Arup's report was to provide conclusions on the nature of the structural movement and its extent and any remedial works. The council also anticipated working with independent specialist consultants to develop a system to seal the cracking ensuring that it is flexible enough to maintain compartmentation to meet the necessary tolerances which we see with this type of construction. Once a design solution was agreed these works were to be commissioned and started immediately.

### **The Arup Investigations**

16. On 13 July 2017 the SDHM wrote to all residents updating them on the meeting that had taken place at Camelot School on the 11th July. At this meeting Arup gave an update about their investigations into the structural implications of the cracks in your blocks. This was followed by a question and answer session with the council's Fire Safety Manager who updated everyone on the impact that these cracks have on fire compartmentation and what was being done to address this.
17. At the meeting officers and councillors heard directly from residents about their concerns and questions and addressed the issues identified, and the ways the council was going to fix them.
18. At the meeting Arup confirmed that they had not found anything in their investigations that gave concern about the structural stability of the building but that they were continuing their assessment. Once their work was completed, a commitment was made to share all their findings with residents.
19. The Fire Safety Manager explained that the gaps impact on compartmentation and talked about the work that the council needs to do to fill the gaps, to make sure that should a fire break out in one of the flats, the fire and smoke would not spread to neighbouring flats or shared areas.

20. It was also reported to residents that the council had started carrying out type 4 fire risk assessments, which are the most detailed and intrusive assessments that can be carried out.
21. Also at the meeting was an independent Building Surveyor, Arnold Tarling, invited by residents to carry out his own investigation of fire safety in the blocks. The council requested his report, and agreed to address his concerns as part of our own review.
22. The first mention of gas and the specific issues relating to gas in the four blocks relating to the specific Large Panel System structure of the blocks, came from Arnold Tarling in week commencing 10 July when the council heard from a BBC journalist that Mr Tarling was carrying out an independent investigation in the blocks, and that gas had been raised as a potential issue. At that point some of the fears raised by Mr Tarling related to misinformation in that residents had been told that the gas had been installed in the 1980s however this was not correct).
23. The SDHM urgently contacted Mr Tarling on 10 July to request details of his concerns so that we could address them, but did not receive a response until Thursday 13 July. However, Mr Tarling attended the public meeting at the Ledbury on Tuesday 11th and asked whether or not we would be investigating this issue. The council agreed to do so, again requested details of his investigations, and immediately commissioned Arup to look into this matter as part of their wider structural investigations at the block. As noted above Arup had originally been commissioned to look into cracks reported to the council at an earlier public meeting.
24. Arup conducted this additional investigation and the council received a letter, emailed on Thursday 10th August, stating that they had not found evidence of the strengthening they would have expected to find in these blocks. The council therefore immediately took the decision to turn off the gas and informed the DCLG Permanent Secretary because of the potential wider implications for landlords of similarly constructed blocks across the country.
25. On 15 August 2017 the Leader of the Council wrote to Ledbury tower residents who had been informed immediately of the Arup findings and gave an update on the arrangements that officers were putting in place to provide temporary hot water and cooking facilities, and install an alternative power supply.
26. Engineering staff were immediately on site and contractors were contacted to prepare for this work. The identified solution was to fit electric immersion heaters and electric cookers into every flat within the next few weeks. Work immediately started to test and install the immersion heaters as the first priority.
27. Until this work was completed, the leisure centres continued to offer free shower facilities for all Ledbury residents, and hot plates were available for anyone who needed them. Staff remained on hand 24 hours a day in the TRA hall to offer personal support and advice.
28. The letter from the Leader also informed residents that there was still a major works programme to carry out, which is likely to start next year, to bring the Ledbury Towers up to an excellent standard, with a permanent solution to the cracks. The letter committed to working with residents to develop a plan and timetable for this work.

29. On 17 August 2017 the Leader wrote again to residents with a more detailed update on progress with these works.
30. This was followed with a public meeting held on 23 August 2017. Notes of this meeting are attached as Appendix 1.
31. On 30 August 2017 Arup provided their interim report on their investigations and this was shared with all Ledbury tower residents the report concluded the following:
  - *The tower blocks on Ledbury Estate have been assessed against current building regulations and government guidance for LPS blocks with piped gas.*
  - *The BRE report dated 1985 found that Ledbury (then Commercial way) was a Taylor Woodrow Anglian 'Type B' building and that "The flank wall joints in 'Type B' TWA buildings are likely to be adequate" in the event of a gas explosion of magnitude 34kPa.*
  - *In the absence of documentation on record specifically relating to Ledbury Estate, Southwark Council asked Arup to check whether the four tower blocks at Ledbury Estate satisfy the Government recommendations for robustness of Large Panel System tower blocks with piped gas. Specifically, Southwark Council requested that Arup undertake a rapid assessment of whether a gas explosion could lead to progressive and disproportionate collapse?*
  - *Physical investigations were carried out in the two available (vacant) flats, one in Bromyard and one in Skenfrith House. No reinforcement was detected in the internal (cross) loadbearing walls or the internal leaf of the external (flank) loadbearing walls, as such the walls would fail under a 34kPa and also a 17kPa blast load (blast pressures for piped and bottled gas as defined by BRE ). The loss of walls would undermine the support to the floor slabs immediately above and investigations of the connection between the floor slabs and wall above show that the connection is incapable of supporting the weight of the floor in tension. The extent of the loss of the floor slabs in the floor above is likely to be greater than 15% of the total floor area at that level which fails to satisfy the Building Regulations Approved Document A – Structure. The buildings fail to satisfy the three criterion as defined in BRE's Handbook for the Structural Assessment of Large Panel System (LPS) Dwelling Blocks for Accidental Loading.*
  - *It is recommended that piped gas is turned off from the tower blocks on Ledbury Estate. Note: at the time of finalising this report, the gas has already been turned off. Based on the findings of the investigations undertaken, it would be impractical to strengthen the building to accommodate piped gas. The assessment also shows that the wall panels would fail under blast pressures defined by BRE for non-piped gas. It is therefore recommended that gas is not re-introduced in any form. It is further recommended that the gas pipes be removed, to ensure there will be no future use of piped gas.*

- *As discussed in the previous sections of this report, at this particular time, the assessment that we have carried out is not a full assessment. The assessment has focused on the areas of the building known to be most vulnerable when considering the effect of a gas explosion. This limited assessment has identified connection details that would require strengthening in order to enhance the margin of safety to where it needs to be for this type of building for future use, to bring within required limits the extent of damage that would be caused in the event of accidental damage to the structure.*
- *With gas turned off from the blocks the immediate and main risk will be removed.*

### **Current Situation Update**

32. Heating, hot water and cooking: So far the council has accessed 34 flats to fit immersion heaters to provide a (limited) hot water supply to residents. In most flats we have had to remove asbestos in the locations needed for the new cylinders, and the asbestos contractors have accessed 51 flats. We have the ability to do 20 a day subject to residents giving access so if this happens could complete in two weeks. This is dependent on residents providing access. We have teams of both asbestos and heating contractors on site ready to do their work and residents have been asked to make an appointment with their Resident Services Officer so we can complete this work without delay.
33. We have instructed Keepmoat to source and supply the number of electric cookers required, but cannot install these until the electrical supply within and to the blocks has been upgraded. These will be ordered by around 13<sup>th</sup> September and the first batch will arrive for fitting within 7 days and the rest will follow within 1-2 weeks at latest.
34. The blocks' electrical supplies and local network do not have the capacity for the additional load of immersion heaters and electric cookers. Keepmoat are currently on site undertaking works to the blocks over the next two weeks, and will be finished by 6<sup>th</sup> September and we are also working with UKPN in order to upgrade their local supplies to the blocks. We will keep residents informed of any proposed power outages as a result of this work. These will be for a working day each block.
35. Longer term the council needs to provide residents with a proper, permanent heating and hot water service.
36. We plan to install a district heating system to each of the four tower blocks. Initially this will mean that each block will have a temporary large boiler sited somewhere outside the block on the ground floor. Pipework from the boiler will be run internally up the blocks and connected to the existing radiator and hot water circuit within each flat.
37. To do this successfully and perhaps more importantly, quickly, before the onset of colder weather, we will need access into each flat on approximately four occasions. We are aiming to have this work completed by mid October, in time for when we can expect colder weather, so we are working hard with residents to provide the access needed to meet this timescale.

### **Housing moves:**

38. The SDHM wrote to all residents of the Ledbury towers on 19 July 2017. This letter reiterated that Arup, the structural engineers appointed by the council, had not found anything of concern in their surveys with regards to the structure of the four tower blocks. Their surveys were ongoing and a commitment was made to report back to residents on their findings as soon as possible.
39. The letter also set out information on what the council would do regarding rehousing which was a question raised by residents at the meeting on 11th July 2017 and again in a deputation to the full council meeting on Wednesday, 12 July. In response to the deputation a commitment was made that anybody who was concerned about their safety would be offered the opportunity to go into Band 1 and bid for an alternative home. The letter also set out how residents could apply to go on Southwark's homesearch bidding scheme and be placed in Band 1. This was available for existing tenants and their households.
40. Residents were also informed that Band 1 is the highest possible priority the council can award on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme giving residents the ability to bid for a new home, including both Southwark Council and housing association properties advertised on the council's homesearch website with a right to return to their home on the Ledbury for those who only wished to move away from the estate temporarily, while the works were completed.
41. To assist residents with this process Housing Solutions Officers were based with the team at the Ledbury TRA Hall. It was also agreed that to assist with the cost of moving, a sum of £5,800 would be provided.
42. 125 Households have registered on the Homesearch bidding scheme although some of these are not yet actively bidding.
43. As a result 94 Households have been placed in band 1, the highest priority for housing. 31 Households need to be verified through the submission of documents/system checks. This is currently being prioritised so we can do the process as quickly as possible and officers are on site contacting residents in order to get the remaining cases registered in band 1. Of the 188 tenanted properties in the four towers 63 have not yet placed their name on the bidding scheme.
44. 4 residents have moved. 8 offers have been made and accepted and these households are awaiting move in dates. 10 residents finished in 1st position with their bids and are waiting to view properties. 11 Households finished within 2nd & 3rd positions and are awaiting confirmation of viewing results from 1st applicants. 2 offers were refused by residents following viewing/second thoughts after the bidding cycle. 4 households placed in Bed and breakfast accommodation. This was 6 but 2 have returned.
45. The Housing Solutions service is stationed at the Ledbury office Monday – Sunday 9am-5pm and the office remains open with the extended team of officers from across housing and modernisation 8 am to 8 pm and cover for emergencies 24 hours a day. The officers are able to provide assistance on getting registered, updating medical information, receiving documents and updating errors on applications. They can also provide bidding advice and updates on any offers.
46. All tenants have a right to return to the Towers when the works have completed.
47. We are finalising plans with Hyde Housing Association to purchase a brand new block very close to the Ledbury, with 80 properties from 1 to 3 bedrooms. These will be council properties at council rent. We are hoping these will be ready this November, and we will reserve the whole block for Ledbury Tower residents.

## **Structural works and issues**

48. ARUP say that with gas turned off from the blocks the immediate and main risk will be removed. However, given the concerns raised and the apparent issues with the historical documents we have regarding the history of the blocks we want to make sure everything is thoroughly investigated and so we have asked ARUP to continue to do a comprehensive structural investigation that will include getting into other empty properties across all four blocks to advise on works as we move forward into the major works phase. ARUP are the leading experts in this field and are working with others that have extensive experience of large panel system buildings and understand these kinds of buildings. These further investigations will include testing of materials (the concrete) and an engineering assessment to understand where we may want to add to the strengthening of the tower blocks. We have impressed on ARUP the need to conclude all of this quickly but we want the assessments to be thorough. In other major works projects structural surveys can take 9 months but we have asked them to report on 20th November.
49. In the meantime, we are continuing to address the fire safety issues in the four tower blocks. We hope to install a new system on the communal landings which will enable us to reduce the number of fire marshals. We are also finalising the specification for the permanent solution to deal with the fire compartmentation issues.

## **Financial assistance**

50. £200 has been agreed as a one-off compensation payment per household for the inconvenience and disadvantage caused. Cheques were hand delivered to all tenants in the four Towers on 31<sup>st</sup> August. Another payment of £20 weekly is being paid while heating and hot water is restored to the four blocks, this has also been applied to tenants of non-resident leaseholders. This is consistent with compensation that has been given elsewhere in the borough in emergency situations.
51. The council is also paying disturbance payments to those who move. So far 2 payments of £5,800 have been processed to pay for two permanent moves. Payments are subject to any outstanding arrears being deducted. We aim to process any allowance as soon as sign-up is completed.
52. If residents speak to officers in the TRA hall, cash can be made available for any emergencies - so far we have paid out £308.99 for things like an oyster card top up to access showers, meals, laundry and replacing the electric kettle of one resident who needed a new kettle because of heating water.
53. The council is compensating residents, as it does in other similar emergency situations, and is paying for Temporary Accommodation for those who need it. Residents have also been offered the opportunity of a longer term move and a disturbance payment. Rent should still be paid.

## **Conclusion**

54. The situation at Ledbury Towers is constantly evolving and is being closely monitored by daily briefing meetings chaired by the SDHM which responds to all of the operational issues captured by the locally based team as well as the broad strategic issues such as, major works, ongoing structural surveys and rehousing options.



55. As such the information contained in this report is current at the time of writing however officer will provide further updates at the meeting 11<sup>th</sup> September 2017.