



Housing Committee

26 June 2017

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| Title | Grenfell Tower Fire Response |
| Report of | Deputy Chief Executive |
| Wards | All |
| Status | Public |
| Urgent | Yes |
| Key | Yes |
| Enclosures | Appendix 1 - Fire safety and the Council's response to the Grenfell Tower Tragedy |
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Summary

This report sets out fire safety arrangements for residential accommodation in Barnet and specific measures that the Council and Barnet Homes are taking in response to the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower earlier this month.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee note the contents of this report and appendix, and in particular that all Barnet Homes properties have up to date Fire Risk Assessments and comply with fire safety legislation, and the decision to remove cladding on three tower blocks at Granville Road.
2. That the Committee instructs Barnet Homes to carry out a review of fire safety measures in the Council's twenty eight high rise blocks to identify any measures that are required to move beyond legislative compliance to deliver best practice in fire safety including the consideration of sprinkler systems, improved fire and smoke alarm systems and other measures.
3. That the Committee agrees that, subject to agreement by Policy and Resources Committee on 27th June, an initial £10 million is allocated from the Council's Housing Revenue Account to meet the cost of fire safety

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| improvements. |
| 4. That the Committee delegates authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee to approve a programme of fire safety enhancement works with an initial budget of up to £10m, to begin as soon as practical. |
| 5. That the Committee requests that a report is brought to its next meeting with an update on delivery of the programme; and further requests that if measures identified exceed £10m that the further report makes proposals for extending the programme beyond the initial allocation. |
| 6. That the Committee instructs officers to revise the Housing Revenue Account 30 year business plan to accommodate this programme of fire safety enhancements, for approval at the next meeting of the Committee. |

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the existing fire safety arrangements for high rise buildings in Barnet as well as actions taken and measures put in place by the Council and Barnet Homes following the Grenfell Tower fire, and seeks the Committee's approval for a programme of enhanced fire safety measures.
- 1.2 The Council and Barnet Homes take fire safety extremely seriously. Extensive measures are in place to ensure that our homes comply with fire safety regulations, as set out in Appendix 1. However, the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14th June 2017 has highlighted the importance of ensuring that blocks meet best practice in fire safety measures and providing reassurance to residents that their homes are safe. Appendix 1 also includes details of the actions that the Council is taking to provide this reassurance, including the identification of a programme of works on the councils 28 high rise blocks¹ to ensure best practice in relation to fire safety.
- 1.3 Barnet Homes manages 28 tower blocks including 10 with cladding systems. Of these 3 tower blocks at Granville Road have been identified as having exterior rain screen panels similar to those reportedly used at Grenfell Tower, although the insulation materials behind the exterior panels are different and made from a non-combustible mineral fibre material. In addition, fire stops made of a non-combustible material have been installed at each floor level and around each window.
- 1.4 Despite the differences between the cladding system used at Granville Road and Grenfell Tower, Council officers have discussed with Barnet Homes (who under the terms of their management agreement with the Council have a responsibility to take measures to ensure the safety of housing) and have agreed to remove the cladding at Granville Road as soon as possible. To address immediate concerns, Barnet Homes have arranged for round the clock fire safety patrols and other measures at Granville Road (see Appendix 1 for more detail).

¹ All buildings with 6 or more stories or 5 or more if clad.

- 1.5 Following the decision to evacuate several tower blocks in Camden, Barnet Homes have carried out further inspections of the blocks at Granville Road with the London Fire Brigade. No additional fire safety concerns have been identified through these inspections, and it is not therefore necessary to evacuate these homes.
- 1.6 Appendix 1 to the report also sets out the Council's role in relation to homes in the borough which it does not own, and the actions we have taken to date to ensure that owners of high rise properties in the borough are responding appropriately following the Grenfell Tower fire, and the safety of residents prioritised.
- 1.7 The exact cause or causes of the spread of the fire at Grenfell Tower will not be known until an investigation has been carried out. Therefore, it is important to note that the scope of any investigations to be carried out on any fire safety risks and measures to be taken on the Council's high rise blocks may need to change as further information becomes available.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 These recommendations provide a mechanism for ensuring that the highest possible standards of fire safety are applied to the Council's housing stock and to invest in measures to upgrade existing fire safety systems as necessary.
- 2.2 The Council also plays a wider role in relation to ensuring that homes outside of its ownership are safe, through its Private Sector Housing and Building Control teams, and its partnerships with Housing Associations.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 The Council could continue to rely on statutory regimes to ensure residents' safety, however it is considered that a more proactive approach is needed.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 Barnet Homes will carry out an assessment of each high rise residential property owned by the Council and in conjunction with the London Fire Brigade and in consultation with local residents, identify a set of measures to improve fire safety, including the consideration of sprinkler systems, improved fire and smoke alarm systems and other measures such as the information given to residents in the event of a fire.
- 4.2 Barnet Homes will proceed as soon as practical with an initial tranche of works identified up to a cost of £10 million.
- 4.3 The full package of measures identified by Barnet Homes will be reported to the Housing Committee in October 2017, along with any additional costs in excess of £10 million and proposed amendments to the 30 year business plan to accommodate these costs.
- 4.4 The Council's building control service are in the process of issuing a briefing note to owners and managing agents of privately owned properties to provide advice on the information we have so far and the checks landlords can make to establish the risk level in their buildings.
- 4.5 The Council will complete a survey of local housing associations to confirm that they are fully compliant with fire safety regulations and have identified any actions required in relation to high rise buildings that may be at risk.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 This report aligns with the Corporate Plan objective to prioritise the delivery of quality services, by investing in the highest standard of fire safety measures for residents living in council properties.
- 5.1.2 The improvement of fire safety in council housing blocks and other housing tenures will also ensure the continuing health and wellbeing of residents.

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 The exact cost of additional fire safety measures is yet to be determined, but expenditure of up to £10 million can be made available from the Council's Housing Revenue Account. Should additional expenditure be recommended, the Committee will be asked to consider this at its next meeting.
- 5.2.2 An updated Housing Revenue Account Business Plan that takes account of any additional capital and revenue expenditure required will be presented to Housing

Committee in October 2017.

- 5.2.3 It is not clear whether any central support will be available for the cost of fire safety measures in response to the Grenfell Tower fire. Officers will monitor this position, and seek central support where possible.

5.3 Social Value

- 5.3.1 Social Value considerations will be considered in the individual investment decisions.

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.4.1 Annex A to the Responsibility for Functions Section of the Council's Constitution (Part 15) gives the Housing Committee specific responsibility in relation to:
- the Housing Strategy (incorporating the Homelessness Strategy);
 - work with Barnet Homes, RSLs and social housing providers to ensure the optimum provision of housing and associated facilities for those who require social housing; and
 - all matters relating to the regulation of private sector housing.
- 5.4.2 Annex A to the Responsibility for Functions Section of the Council's Constitution (Part 15) also enables the Housing Committee to make recommendations to Policy and Resources Committee on issues relation to the budget for the Committee, including virements or underspends and overspends on the budget. No decisions which result in amendments to the agreed budget may be made by the Committee unless and until the amendment has been agreed by Policy and Resources Committee.
- 5.4.3 The Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to keep the housing conditions in their area under review and to inspect the same if it considers a category 1 or 2 hazard (as defined by the Act) exists and gives powers to intervene where they consider housing conditions to be in breach of the same .
- 5.4.4 It is possible that issues of planning and building control may be applicable, however Annex A to Part 15 of the Constitution also states that if any report comes within the remit of more than one committee, to avoid the report being discussed at several committees, the report will be presented and determined at the most appropriate committee. Given the subject matter, it appears this report is best dealt with by the Housing Committee.

5.5 Risk Management

- 5.5.1 Barnet Homes have a robust approach to carrying out fire risk assessments for all council dwellings. There is, however, a risk that if action is not taken to take account of lessons learned from the Grenfell Tower tragedy that the safety of residents could be compromised.
- 5.5.2 The Council will work with the owners of other high rise residential and non-residential blocks, including Housing Associations and private owners to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities in respect of fire safety.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity

- 5.6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must have due regard to the need to: a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; b) advance equality of opportunity between those with a protected characteristic and those without; c) promote good relations between those with a protected characteristic and those without. The 'protected characteristics' referred to are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. It also covers marriage and civil partnership with regard to eliminating discrimination.
- 5.6.2 Investment in existing council housing stock will impact positively on existing council tenants who are generally more diverse than the population of the borough as a whole.

5.7 Consultation and Engagement

- 5.7.1 Residents living in high rise residential blocks owned by the Council have been written to specifically by Barnet Homes to provide reassurance that their homes are safe
- 5.7.2 Residents of Council homes will be consulted as part of reviews of fire safety systems in high rise council blocks.
- 5.7.3 Leaseholders will be consulted as early as possible within the fire safety review process in order to ensure their views in relation to options and recommendations have been taken into account.

5.8 Insight

- 5.8.1 Information about the Council's Housing stock held by Barnet Homes has been used to identify high rise residential blocks owned by the Council.
- 5.8.2 Records held in the Building Control and Planning services have been used to identify blocks in the borough which have recently been re-clad, to enable us to contact their owners.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Not applicable

