

Appendix A – September 2020 Housing and Growth Committee

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

1 Introduction

This report provides a progress update on Fire Safety issues in Barnet, including progress with the agreed package of fire safety improvement works for council properties managed by Barnet Homes, together with activity in relation to relevant Registered Provider and Private Sector housing stock.

2 Building a Safer Future (Building Safety Bill and Fire Safety Bill)

- 2.1 Building a Safer Future is a government-led initiative in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy. It is a framework within which the shortcomings identified in the post-Grenfell review of Building Regulation and Fire Safety can be addressed. These shortcomings include the way high-rise residential buildings are built and managed. Building a Safer Future (BSF) is also intended to deal with situations where residents may raise concerns about the safety of their buildings which they may feel are not taken seriously by their landlord.
- 2.2 Two key pieces of legislation support this initiative – the Building Safety Bill and the Fire Safety Bill. Both Bills have been delayed due to COVID-19, are currently out for consultation and are due to be passed in early 2021 with implementation expected around 6 months thereafter.
- 2.3 The Building Safety Bill will set out to create a new regulator for fire safety under the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It will be responsible for 'high risk' / 'in-scope' buildings (e.g. residential blocks over 18m, but other criteria may be defined through subsequent statutory instruments).
- 2.4 Fire Safety Bill will amend the Fire Safety Order 2005 to clarify that the responsible person or duty-holder for multi-occupied, residential buildings must manage and reduce the risk of fire for:
- the structure and external walls, including cladding, balconies and windows
 - entrance doors to individual flats that open into common parts
- This clarification will empower fire and rescue services to take enforcement action and hold building owners to account if they are not compliant.
- 2.5 This means an expert Building Safety Manager will need to be appointed for each block, a regular inspection regime put in place for fire doors, as well as wider reinforcement of better management and increased accountability, as detailed in the Hackitt report.
- 2.6 The new regulatory framework is designed to make building safety issues transparent to all parties involved and reinforce responsibilities. This includes a role for residents in keeping their buildings safe for themselves and their neighbours. The buildings in scope are currently those 18m or higher.

- 2.7 Following the consultation and the formal introduction of the Bills, it is inevitable that there will be additional requirements for other enhanced aspects of building and fire safety and ongoing management of our buildings and the wider housing stock within the borough. It is therefore likely that additional costs and responsibilities will be identified as this process continues.

3 Council Housing

- 3.1 The fire safety delivery programme for Council housing stock is progressing well following a period of re-programming to incorporate all elements of the investment programme approved by committee:

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:

- 3.2 **Granville Road Recladding** - complete.
- 3.3 **Category 1 High Priority Works** - Good progress including communal areas of high-rise blocks (Whitefields, Grahame Park and Silk House & Shoelands). However, recent delays caused by COVID-19 impeded access to properties and sourcing of materials, mainly affecting Grahame Park, Silk House & Shoelands where completion dates have moved back to Q2 2020/21.
- 3.4 **Additional fire safety works (category 2 and 3a)** - Works at Longford Court only saw minor disruption due to COVID-19; communal elements continued without the need to access homes. Site setup works at Prospect and Norfolk tower blocks in East Finchley commenced in March 2020.
- 3.5 **Installation of sprinklers to blocks of flats with 10 or more floors and 2 or more stairwells** - These are still scheduled for 2020/21 and 2021/22; including the three tower blocks at Granville Road, where work was due to commence in July 2020. Due to a higher than usual number of queries from leaseholders regarding the scope of the works, a decision was taken to delay the works to

allow additional time for resident consultation including with the estates residents association. Works therefore now expected to commence in Q4 2020.

- 3.6 **Installation of sprinklers to sheltered housing blocks and hostels** - Most works are scheduled for 2022/23 and 2023/24, however consideration is being given to accelerating the installation at certain schemes where other disruptive works are scheduled as part of the wider capital investment programme. This applies to sheltered housing at Vale Court and the hostel at Friern Barnet Road.
- 3.7 There are delays at Vale Court due to Covid-19; with resident safety and shielding against Covid-19 prioritised over implementation of the works, although the design process for these fire safety works are proceeding.
- 3.8 At St John's sheltered housing block, incorporation of fire safety works into the wider project that includes a new heating system and electrical upgrades was due to commence in late April 2020, however prospective tenderers are unable to attend site to review the works; the tender period was extended to July 2020 and works are scheduled to commence in September 2020.
- 3.9 **Works to low and medium rise blocks (incl. Type 3 Fire Risk Assessments and any urgent arising works)** - Expert consultants are undertaking in depth FRAs and any urgent works actioned as a priority, with other observations forming part of a longer term planned programme of improvements. While 315 surveys have been undertaken, the programme halted in March due to limited access to properties; but has since recommenced.
- 3.10 **Replacement of composite fire doors** – There are 5000 “glass reinforced polyester” (GRP) composite fire doors installed in homes managed by Barnet Homes. Updated risk assessments informed the proposed replacement programme and discussions with the contractors who supplied and fitted the doors. Agreement has been reached with the contractor that faulty doors will be replaced at the contractor's expense and liability resolved through independent adjudication when the work is finished. Work on this programme continues.
- 3.11 **Whitefields Estate - tower block cladding system** – The three blocks (Clare, Norden and Whyhcote Point), fitted with High-Pressure Laminate (HPL) are due to be demolished in 2023. After expert advice the cladding and non-combustible insulation backing is deemed safe. A programme of work to improve the front doors to flats and fire alarm warning systems is underway and due for completion in December 2020.
- 3.12 **Willow House Fire** - Works are underway and the project progressed well until issues with the integrity of the block and beam flooring surfaced. Consultants are investigating the issues and will make proposals for rectification. These works are likely to result in increased costs and delay the project by 16 weeks. This has further exacerbated delays caused by COVID-19, although works recommenced onsite in June 2020.

- 3.13 **Large Panel System buildings** - Surveys for such works are complex and invasive, requiring tenants to be decanted as concrete must be removed to allow visual inspection alongside calculations to assess structural integrity against an internal gas explosion. The gas distributor, Cadent, have sought reassurance from Barnet Homes that its LPS buildings are safe to retain piped gas, a set of precautionary risk mitigation measures for blocks at West Hendon and Dollis Valley is currently being implemented.
- 3.14 As the recommendation for next steps at Silk House recommended the removal of the piped gas supply to the block, the gas supply to all properties was disconnected in June 2019 whilst replacement communal heating is installed. With no gas being supplied, Cadent do not have concerns about the building, but Barnet Homes have taken additional precautionary measures to prevent accidental loading by not permitting portable gas heaters in high rise buildings; with tenancy audits ensuring portable gas appliances are not being used.
- 3.15 Surveys have been completed for Marsh Drive and blocks in Dollis Valley that confirm they do not meet the required standard. It was agreed with Cadent to work towards decant of Marsh Drive, and piped gas decommissioning at relevant Dollis Valley blocks, by October 2020. This agreement is based on Barnet Homes implementing safety measures that include installing gas safety monitoring equipment in each flat, removal of gas appliances and monthly safety checks of the gas boilers. Gas safety monitoring is now installed in all but 6 of the 358 homes, for which a legal process to gain access is in progress.
- 3.16 Cadent have acknowledged Covid-19 impacts and agreed the potential for extension to February 2021 for decanting Marsh Drive; although both parties have agreed to endeavour to achieve the October 2020 timescale. At the Dollis Valley blocks, where decant is phased over five years, a new electric heating system will be installed by October 2020, with work due to commence in July.
- 3.17 Barnet Homes are currently assessing how the new requirements of the Building Safety Bill and Fire Safety Bill will impact on the council housing stock in Barnet. There are currently expected to be 25 'in scope' buildings within the Barnet Homes stock. One area of change for example will be maintaining digital records of building components and evidencing competence of all parties involved in the building and management process. The impact of the measures and changes is likely to increase the cost of the fire safety programme and the committee will be updated when the extent of the impacts are clearer.

4 Registered Providers

- 4.1 Of three Housing Associations with confirmed ACM cladding on blocks, works at one are complete, and both of the others are due to complete in September 2020, in one case this includes the 3-months delay due to Covid-19.
- 4.2 In addition, the further provider with a block held through a lease in Colindale, has an up to date fire risk assessment and the freeholder is responsible for

replacing the cladding. The owner of the building has recently confirmed they plan to replace the cladding with fibre cement panels. The owners have been liaising with the council's building control team and have applied to MHCLG for funding to meet the replacement costs of the cladding.

- 4.3 Impacts of the building a safer future programme are currently unknown, but ongoing engagement and partnership working arrangements with the sector will ensure all RSLs keep the council updated on the measures they are putting into place to address the changing responsibilities.

5 Private Sector buildings (residential and commercial)

- 5.1 There continues to be two privately owned blocks higher than 18 meters with failed ACM cladding that the council's building control team are in touch with; both have confirmed plans to replace the cladding and have advised that they have requested funding from the Government to assist with replacement.
- 5.2 An additional high-rise block identified and inspected in September 2019 was served with an Improvement Notice by the Fire Authority and inspected by Barnet and the LGA's Joint Inspection Team (JIT), who reported back to the building owners and the Fire Authority. Following liaison with the council and the Fire Authority, extensive work has been completed to the block and therefore the Fire Authority have confirmed their initial notice has been complied with. A revised Fire Risk Assessment has been undertaken and follow-up works planned. The Council have obtained extensive legal advice to inform its determination whether to take any action under the Housing Act 2004.
- 5.3 Following wider concerns about the safety of some non-ACM systems, the Government's requested a further exercise to identify external wall covering on all buildings higher than 18 meters in their area. The review by building control officers is complete. The council has written to landowners to seek further information, to identify the type of insulation used for each building and external features such as balconies, where required to update the national dataset. The initial exercise completed in May 2020; although the council still needs information back from about half of the landowners deemed 'in-scope' and is continuing to chase them for information. This work with the Government and LFEPA to ensure the ongoing safety of residents will continue.