
Decision Session – Executive Member for the Environment

02 October 2017

Report of Assistant Director, Customer & Digital Services

Update Report on action to mitigate risk of fire at City of York Council following Grenfell Tower fire

Summary

- 1) This report provides an update of the work undertaken to mitigate the risk from fire following the Grenfell Tower fire as requested by the Executive Member for the Environment at his decision session on 3rd July 2017.

Recommendations

- 2) The Executive Member is asked to note the ongoing work to reduce the risk from fire and the council's response to managing and responding to those risks.

Reason: To ensure the Executive Member and residents are assured that the council has proper arrangements in place for managing and responding to the risk from fire.

Background and Summary Conclusions

- 3) Following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017 public concern regarding the risk from fire has been substantial. However the council has been actively managing fire risk for a substantial period of time. CYC operate a fire safety management regime in line with the Regulatory Reform (Fire safety) Order 2005 (RRO). All social housing, general needs, sheltered housing, hostels, and older persons housing blocks and schemes have had a fire safety risk assessment, as have schools and other corporate properties.
- 4) A report on the activity of Housing Services was considered and noted by the Health, Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Committee held on 13th September 2017. The information contained in that report is reflected in paragraphs 5 to 15 below.

- 5) There are a total of 592 communal areas that fall under the RRO – all, except two where the council have been unable to gain access, have had a FRA. This includes 70 blocks identified, which had not previously been flagged in the council's asset management system as having communal areas. However, all of these areas have now been assessed. All urgent remedial actions have been completed, and any non-urgent actions are being addressed through a remedial works programme.
- 6) The council has completed a requested survey regarding fire safety in tower blocks from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and were able to report that CYC had no blocks over 18m and no CYC homes had Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) type cladding. Subsequent reports to the Local Government Association (LGA) have been made outlining the same position. Assurances have also been provided around CYC schools and corporate buildings. A separate response was also made in relation to buildings in, or about to go through the council planning process.
- 7) In terms of action taken to communicate with residents on fire safety risk following Grenfell:
 - All tenants and leaseholders have been written to providing assurance about the fire safety of their homes. A press release was issued regarding CYC's response to issues and concerns raised by the Grenfell Tower fire.
 - The Director of Health, Housing and Adult Social Care was also interviewed by local radio.
- 8) In addition three detailed briefings were provided for Councillors covering information across the council's housing stock, schools, the university, and buildings in the private sector.
- 9) Senior managers and staff from Housing and Health and Safety service met to formulate an action plan following the tragic events. The action plan will have been considered by the Housing & Community Safety Senior Management Team for approval on 28th September 2017. The action plan relates to two distinct themes, ensuring compliance with fire safety regulations and ensuring all tenants, residents, and staff understand what to do in the event of a fire occurring.
- 10) Fire risk assessments (FRA) were commissioned in June 2017 and were completed in July 2017 on 70 blocks that had previously not been flagged as having communal areas that fell under the requirements of the RRO. Any immediate and urgent actions were then undertaken. A particular issue was keeping communal areas clear of obstruction and or fire hazards. These blocks were identified following a data review undertaken

as part of a wider review of fire safety management which was ongoing prior to Grenfell.

- 11) A schedule has been produced for the outstanding FRA reviews which prioritises those property types most at risk; i.e. converted houses/flats; sheltered and older persons housing and hostels; and blocks where fire incidents have previously occurred. There will be more intrusive assessments to check the compartmentalisation (fire spread prevention measures e.g. between floors or rooms of a building) between properties where void properties become available in the blocks where reviews are due to be carried out. This work will be carried out by appropriately qualified fire risk contractors.
- 12) With regard to the outstanding 307 reviews, these are reviews of fire risk assessments that are not of the same standard of recent FRA's and are up to three years old. The requirement within the RRO is a regular review and is not specific, however three years is the CYC recommendation for review of properties of this type. Housing staff have been trained to identify and report any fire issues in the interim time. An appropriate framework contract has been identified by a procurement consortium to secure contractors to deliver this programme of assessment reviews. The initial estimate is that this will allow commencement of the review programme in November 2017 and completion by March 2018.
- 13) A corporate fire policy exists and, in association with Health and Safety, a separate social housing specific fire safety strategy has been drafted, which along with the action plan was to be discussed by the Housing and Community Safety Senior Management Team on 28th September 2017.
- 14) Through the modernisation programme (Tenants Choice) the council has installed hard wired detectors to approximately 5000 of its 7,700 homes. Prior to this programme, battery operated detectors were fitted to the majority of homes but records of these were not kept. To fill this gap an accelerated programme to install smoke detectors is in development to ensure the remainder of the properties have a detector. To assist in this process there are discussions with North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service regarding a proposal to put a joint project in place to install lithium (10 year) battery operated detectors in these properties as an interim measure.
- 15) A regular programme of scheme/block inspections will be carried out by Housing Management Officers, which whilst aimed at reviewing all aspects of the physical environment around blocks, also looks to identify any problems with obstacles or stored belongings in hallways/entrances /stairwells and other communal areas. Building Services, Health & Safety and Housing teams, will be coordinating this work alongside the FRA programme; and it will provide an important 'heads-up' function to identify

any major issues that could impact on residents ability to exit blocks in the event of a fire, or on the overall fire integrity of the block.

- 16) The Executive Member will be aware the public inquiry has commenced into the events at Grenfell. There is also an independent review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety is being led by Dame Judith Hackitt. The review will urgently assess the effectiveness of current building and fire safety regulations and related compliance and enforcement issues, with a focus on multi occupancy high rise residential buildings. This will include addressing whether the government's large-scale cladding system testing programme identified any potential systemic failures.
- 17) Two key priorities of this latter review are to develop a more robust regulatory system for the future, and the provision of further assurance to residents that the buildings they live in are safe and remain safe. Whilst the review will cover the regulatory system for all buildings, it will have a specific focus on multi occupancy high rise residential buildings.
- 18) In terms of assurances that can be given on whether non-council owned high rise residential buildings in York meet existing and future fire safety building regulation, the picture is unclear as the council is not the only provider of building regulation services. Currently CYC supervises 60% of construction within the authority boundary with 40% being provided by private service providers (Approved Inspectors (AIs)). This means that on approximately 40% of developments, CYC will not have access to any constructional information, and therefore can provide no assurances about fire safety regulations in place, if they are not the appointed building regulation service provider. Approximately 10 -15 different AI companies work within council's area at any given time, each providing differing interpretations of the building regulations. The council could consider whether it should contribute to the Hackitt review in light of this issue.
- 19) The review will report jointly to the Communities Secretary and Home Secretary. An interim report will be submitted in autumn 2017 and a final report submitted in spring 2018. The Review will co-operate fully with the Public Inquiry, and Dame Judith Hackitt will review her recommendations in the light of the findings of the Inquiry.
- 20) The regional Local Government fire safety sub group, attended by fire safety professionals from councils across the North, met shortly after the Grenfell Tower fire to compare responses to this tragic event. The meeting gave particular consideration the use of sprinkler systems, and noted that the majority of group members are now planning to, or have already installed, sprinklers or misting systems to sheltered and care home accommodation. The aim being to reduce the risks of fire ignition, and limit any consequential impacts on resident safety and property. The meeting concluded that regardless of current regulatory guidance

regarding the use of sprinklers, members should confirm their individual policy positions regarding the provision of sprinklers for stock under their management.

- 21) Officers will monitor any regulatory changes or guidance introduced by the government arising out of this review to determine if the council needs to make changes to how it manages fire risk across its property portfolio.

Consultation

- 22) Officers from Housing Services and Building Control have been consulted in the drafting of this report.

Options

- 23) There are no options in this report given that the recommendations are to note the content only.

Analysis

- 24) All information is contained in the body of the report.

Council Plan

- 25) Outcomes achieved by the activities covered in this report help to deliver priorities in the Council Plan 2015/19 in support of 'A prosperous city for all' in providing safe homes for residents.

Implications:

- 26)
- a. **Financial:** The cost of the additional work will be contained with existing budgets.
 - b. **Human Resources (HR):** None
 - c. **Equalities:** None
 - d. **Legal:** The content of this report contributes to evidence that the council is complying with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
 - e. **Crime and Disorder:** There are no crime and disorder implications to this report.
 - f. **Information Technology (ICT):** None

g. Property: None

h. Other: No known other implications.

Risk Management

- 27) The controls and evidence in this report mitigate/minimise risks associated with fire in homes.

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Report Approved

Date 21/09/17

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

No specialist implications

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

Background Papers:

Report and decision record from Executive Member for Environment Decision Session on 3rd July 2017. The report can be found [here](#).

Report from Health, Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Committee on 13th September 2017. The report can be found [here](#).

List of abbreviations used in this report:

RRO	Regulatory Reform (Fire safety) Order 2005
ACM	Aluminium Composite Material
CYC	City of York Council
H&S	Health & Safety
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
FRA	Fire Risk Assessment
LGA	Local Government Association
AI	Approved Inspectors