
Fire Safety – Supporting Information

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017 and the communication from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which followed, West Berkshire Council instigated a series of actions and activities to ensure the fire safety of its buildings is both compliant and well managed.
- 1.2 This report offers an update on tasks undertaken and any further planned actions.

2. Supporting Information

- 2.1 Following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017, the DCLG issued a letter on 18th June 2017 to Chief Executives of both Local Authorities and registered Housing Associations. This letter encouraged these organisations to identify if any new buildings or refurbishments contained aluminium composite cladding (ACM) and to check that its buildings had robust fire risk assessments (FRA).
- 2.2 The DCLG indicated that priority be given to residential blocks considered to be 'high rise', these being of six storeys or 18m high.
- 2.3 It was established early in the process, through examining WBC's own estate, that of Sovereign Housing (the largest Housing Association in West Berkshire) and through the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) for private residential blocks, that:
 - (1) WBC has no high rise residential blocks;
 - (2) Sovereign has no high rise residential blocks;
 - (3) Eight private high rise blocks exist, located at Park Way and the Racecourse.
- 2.4 Up to the end of September 2017, the following activities had been undertaken:
 - (1) A combined Officer and Member group formed to discuss all relevant matters and agree actions;
 - (2) Completed questionnaire submitted by WBC Education Service answering questions posed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). No follow on action required;
 - (3) The Care Quality Commission (CQC) confirmed to WBC they had communicated directly with providers seeking assurances that robust FRA's were in place. No action for WBC;

- (4) For providers of services to WBC falling outside CQC scrutiny, WBC's Commissioning Team has communicated directly with providers reminding them of their duties;
- (5) A fire safety questionnaire was issued to all 'Responsible Persons' for individual sites, both WBC schools and non school sites, to establish the sufficiency of the current FRAs and the existence of any Aluminium Composite Material cladding (ACM).

2.5 Since September 2017, the following further activities have been undertaken:

- (1) The information from both schools and non-school building questionnaires has been collated by Property Services;
- (2) 24 sites (of 109) either expressed potential existence of ACM cladding or completed the 'unsure' section of the questionnaire (mainly the latter) and all of these sites have been assessed from building data or visited by a WBC Building Surveyor. This confirmed that no ACM cladding is present in WBC buildings;
- (3) 16 sites (of 109) expressed possible issues with currency of their FRA's. These have been assessed and where necessary have been brought forward in the rolling programme of FRA's managed by Property Services to be completed in 17/18. Any actions coming from these refreshed FRA's will be addressed by the Responsible Person, and where requiring significant works will be addressed by Property Services through the capital programme;
- (4) WBC Property Services has submitted on the government portal 'Delta' information on private residential properties, specifically related to high rise properties and cladding presence. This was completed using data provided by RBFRS.
- (5) RBFRS has formed a joint working group with the six Berkshire unitary authorities to offer a long term forum to share views. This is attended by representatives from WBC Public Protection team.
- (6) WBC continues to receive updates and communications from DCLG the majority of which now offers information on national progress rather than requiring specific action.

2.6 WBC received in December 2017 copy of the interim report of the independent review of building regulations and fire safety which had received ministerial statement from the Communities Secretary and comment from the Independent Expert Advisory panel.

2.7 The key findings of the interim report were that 'the current regulatory system for ensuring fire safety in high rise and complex buildings is not fit for purpose', the key reasons for this being:

- (1) Current regulations and guidance are too complex and unclear;
- (2) Clarity of roles and responsibilities is unclear;
- (3) Means of assessing and ensuring competency of key people is inadequate;
- (4) Compliance, enforcement and sanctions are too weak;
- (5) The route for residents to escalate concerns is unclear and inadequate;
- (6) The system of product testing, marketing and quality assurance is not clear.

2.8 The interim report set the direction for change covering six broad areas:

Regulation and guidance

- (1) The rules ensuring high-rise and other complex buildings are built safe to be more risk based and proportionate;
- (2) Those responsible for high-rise and complex buildings to be held to account to a higher degree;
- (3) There should be a shift away from government solely holding the burden for updating and maintaining guidance;
- (4) Regulations and guidance must be simplified and unambiguous.

Roles and responsibilities

- (5) Primary responsibility for ensuring that buildings are fit for purpose must rest with those who commission, design and build them;
- (6) Roles and responsibilities across the whole life cycle of a building must be clearer.

Competence

- (7) There is a need to raise levels of competence and establish formal accreditation of those engaged in fire prevention aspects of design, construction, inspection and maintenance of high rise and complex buildings.

Process, compliance and enforcement

- (8) There needs to be a golden thread for high-rise residential and complex buildings so that the original design intent and any subsequent changes are recorded and properly reviewed;
- (9) There needs to be stronger and more effective enforcement activity.

Residents' voice and raising concerns

- (10) Residents need to be reassured that an effective system is in place to maintain safety in their homes;
- (11) There must be clear, quick and effective route for residents' concerns to be addressed.

Quality assurance and products

- (12) Products must be properly tested and certified and there is a need to ensure oversight of the quality of installation work;
- (13) Marketing of products must be clear and easy to interpret.

2.9 Once the full and final outcome of the independent review has been concluded and recommendation received, formed from the report WBC will, like other local authorities give consideration to how this impacts on its business in terms of building regulation services, enforcement duties, as a property owner and service provider.

3. Options for Consideration

3.1 This report offers an update on activities to date regarding fire safety, and does not convey options.

4. Proposals

4.1 It is proposed to continue to be engaged with actions and activities in the following manner

- (1) WBC Property Services to continue to lead on activities;
- (2) To continue to receive and act upon communications coming from DCLG and other sources;
- (3) To consider the final recommendations of the 'independent review of building regulations and fire safety' and any impact on WBC;
- (4) WBC officers to continue to work with RBFRS and other Berkshire unitary authorities in a joint working group for the better management of fire safety in Berkshire;
- (5) WBC Property Services to continue to conduct its rolling programme of Fire Risk Assessments across all sites/properties in its estate.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017, WBC has engaged in activities instigated by DCLG requests and has extended this to conduct safety checks of all of its buildings. WBC will continue to engage with any ongoing DCLG requests and following recommendations coming from the independent review will address the impact on its services, projects and assets.

6. Consultation and Engagement

6.1 N/a

Background Papers: Interim report issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government – *Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety*
