

Report of the Director Resources & Housing

Report to Executive Board

Date: 17 July 2017

Subject: Grenfell Tower Update

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report describes activity and the current position in Leeds regarding the response to the events of the Grenfell Tower fire. Whilst still fast moving at this stage, the report outlines some issues for consideration both in the immediate term and over the coming months.
2. The immediate priority for Leeds City Council following the events of Grenfell Tower has been the assurance of Leeds citizens regarding their personal safety. Initially this was focussed particularly on the Council's 116 high rise blocks, where investigations have confirmed that of the 23 cladded blocks in Leeds we do not have any Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) type of claddings systems that are similar to the system installed at Grenfell Towers. This, and further safety and advice and reassurance have been communicated to residents directly and through media and press releases. Resident engagement sessions for all blocks have taken place over the last three weeks.
3. As the situation has developed further, concern has also been raised regarding other high rise structures in the city not under the ownership of the council. Proactively, the council and West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) have written to all owners, landlords or managers of high rise buildings in the city, to urge them to take necessary measures to test cladding and update fire risk assessments, and to communicate with their tenants or occupiers.

4. Other actions have also been taken as part of the strategic action plan to assess and respond to the impact of the Grenfell Tower fire in Leeds. This has included assessing other public buildings such as schools and hospitals, controlling procedures in case of the need to evacuate properties and keeping local stakeholders up to date on all developments.

Recommendations

1.1 Members of Executive Board are recommended to:

- 1) Note progress on delivering the action plan (annex 1) and support ongoing prioritisation of the post-Grenfell work, noting the early implications and issues for consideration
- 2) In relation to the role of scrutiny boards, task the following boards to pick up scrutiny of the relevant actions / emerging issues:

Strategy and Resources – emergency planning

Infrastructure and investment – private sector properties and building control

Environment, Housing and Communities – council housing stock safety, resident engagement and investment decisions

- 3) Receive further updates and reports on issues with implications for the city as and when required

1. Background Information

- 1.1 The horrific events of the 14 June in west London have resulted in continued public and media interest in the safety of high-rise blocks across the UK. This has been particularly focussed on the presence of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) types of cladding systems that are similar to the system installed at Grenfell Towers, which fire safety experts have pointed at as a possible reason the blaze spread so quickly.
- 1.2 The Government's initial testing strategy focussed on asking local authorities, housing associations and landlords to submit small samples of cladding to test whether they had the ACM material similar to Grenfell Tower. A subsequent release on 6th July from DCLG has communicated that this process has now changed to also include testing various common cladding systems on a 'whole system' scale following advice from an independent expert panel. New instructions for landlords are expected, and the Council and fire service will continue to support the DCLG in engaging particularly with the private sector to ensure the safety of their buildings.
- 1.3 As well as the fire safety of Grenfell Tower and similar blocks (council and private), attention has also focussed on the response from Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council and central government. The event has also touched on wider concerns regarding the levels of inequality in the UK, with the inequality between Grenfell residents and those in the surrounding Kensington and Chelsea borough being highlighted.

2 Main Issues

- 2.1 The following section details work to date undertaken by Leeds City Council and partners since the events of the Grenfell fire. A strategic task group has been established to oversee this work, and includes all relevant council service leads and representatives of the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service. The work is also summarised and risk rated in the action log available as annex 1 to this paper.

2.2 Social Housing

Leeds City Council currently has 116 high rise blocks, of which 23 have some kind of cladding on them. Whilst we have been able to assure Government and our tenants that no Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding similar to that used on Grenfell Tower has been used on our high rise blocks, the council has been taking a number of proactive steps to reassure residents in both clad and non-clad blocks of their safety and to make further assessments on fire safety. A summary of the action currently in progress or completed includes:

Building tests

We have proactively decided to investigate some of the cladding used on our blocks, despite not being required to do so by Government. This investigation is currently being scoped with an expert contractor and will focus on providing assurance on the compliance of the specification and workmanship of the cladding. The tests are for re-assurance, and may not happen immediately as contractors are understandably prioritising the mandatory work for government.

High rise blocks are clearly the area of primary concern and thus our area of initial focus. Once the results of the investigations are understood there needs to be consideration of medium and low rise buildings that also have some form of cladding. The Authority and West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) have a joint Fire Safety Concordat, that allows both parties to agree on a hierarchy of risk mitigation measures for the whole Council Housing stock. When developing or reviewing the Concordat both parties agree that high rise buildings should be prioritised over low and medium rise buildings, predominantly due to the ease of firefighting these properties

Fire Safety Approach

Housing Leeds has a mature Fire Safety Policy, which considers the investment into the blocks, fire prevention measures and also advice given to residents in the event of a fire. Within days of Grenfell, officers met with WYFRS to review this policy and put in place connections to any upcoming national guidance. The clear position is that Housing Leeds are not intending to change the current Fire Safety Policy, but confirm this message to residents, staff and partners and to ensure actions within it are diligently carried out as usual.

Resident Engagement

It was a priority for us to offer residents of high rise flats as much reassurance as possible following the Grenfell fire. Immediately following the fire a Resident Engagement Plan was developed to capture our approach to sharing information and supporting residents with any concerns they may have about fire safety.

Two letters have been sent to residents living in high rise to provide updates on progress and the latest fire safety advice. A third letter was sent to residents living in high rise blocks with cladding to provide more specific information about the cladding and what actions are being taken in relation to the cladding.

To complement this we have been holding local resident engagement sessions to cover all blocks across the city. These have been held as local drop in sessions at blocks to give residents the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns they may have and to enable us to reassure residents of actions that we are taking. Senior housing staff and technical staff have been available at the drop in sessions, which started on 27 June, and finish on 14 July.

The main areas of concern being raised by residents are around the safety of cladding and when the results of tests will be made available to residents,

whether sprinklers will be installed, the “stay put” policy, fire precautionary measures within blocks and clarification on the sterile communal areas policy. Once the engagement sessions have been completed we will evaluate the key outcomes in order to plan our ongoing engagement plan with residents.

Medium/longer term investment strategy

Housing Leeds has been investing in fire safety measures within its high rise blocks for several years now, spending in excess of £10m in the past 3 years alone. Such measures have been mainly around fire doors, compartmentation, emergency signage and lighting which are nearing completion. A programme is currently underway to fit sprinklers to some blocks. This is initially focusing on those 8 blocks designated as ‘Sheltered Accommodation,’ with 5 blocks now fully completed. Again this investment is underpinned by the Concordat. Whilst the current compartmentation work is designed to prevent the spread of fire and offers considerable assurance to our residents, sprinklers can add a further level of safety by putting out the fire at source, in particular protecting those who are vulnerable. The Council has used its channels into DCLG to propose a national strategy which prioritises those most in need, recognising the limited capacity of the industry to respond at present. The Council will set out its own priorities as part of that process. The Council will, of course, also respond to the finding of the Grenfell Inquiry.

2.3 Private Sector

Whilst the initial focus of the response to Grenfell has focussed on council residential high rise blocks, it is also clear that the issues raised by the tragic events have much wider implications than just social housing. With an estimated 150 private high rise properties in Leeds, a number of which have some form of cladding installed, it is important to work with the private sector to reassure residents and make sure that fire safety measures are in place and up to standard. This work complements direct approaches to private owners and landlords by DCLG.

With that in mind, the council and fire service have looked to engage with building owners or managers particularly where buildings may have similar features to the ACM cladding on the Grenfell Tower

The ‘fire concordat’ between the council and fire service has led to positive and active collaboration between both parties, and this is having particular benefits at this time in terms of clarity of roles and responsibilities. While it is the fire service’s responsibility to assess the safety of any particular building, the council is nevertheless keen to play an active role, working with the private sector to ensure that the city’s people, reputation and economy are equally protected from risk.

Action currently in progress or completed includes:

Building Control inventory

Building control have completed an inventory of all high rise buildings in the city that are potentially in scope for the Government's testing programme, should they be found to have ACM type cladding. This data is being controlled against data held by the fire and rescue service and includes properties such as university accommodation, private residential buildings and commercial premises (as well as public sector property). Whilst everything is being done to collate an accurate information picture for all properties on the inventory, this is taking time and is hindered by weaknesses in the existing national building control regime which means local authorities do not have complete information where building control has been carried out through a private company. As part of any reviews by Government we may want to advocate for the local authority to deal with the building control for major infrastructure and large scale residential high rise.

Communicating with building owners to encourage checks and updating fire safety strategies

We are writing to owners of all the buildings identified in the inventory – jointly with the fire service – urging them to check any cladding and to take up the government-sponsored free testing. Letters have been sent, with priority being given to those that are assessed as potentially having cladding which may need testing.

Letters also strongly recommend all owners of these buildings carry out an urgent review of their fire risk assessments, and update us on all actions taken. This will enable us to provide citywide reassurance to residents and visitors.

The council is also using the existing positive relationship with many large private sector and student landlords – through the Leeds Rental Standard self-regulation scheme – to encourage the sector to work with us on making Leeds a place where people are safe, and feel safe.

Supporting any necessary response

Whilst it is the responsibility of the building owners to test any cladding, where ACM cladding is identified on private buildings the council will support WYFRS and the property owners to take necessary steps to ensure fire safety, liaising with DCLG as required.

Through the feedback from government testing on cladding samples to date, we have been informed of five private properties in Leeds that have had cladding tested through DCLG and have failed. WYFRS and the property owners in each case have agreed on interim fire safety arrangements. Where interim arrangements have involved changes to car parking, the council has been able to facilitate alternative parking for residents.

2.4 Wider response and partnership activity

Evacuation planning

The Resilience and Emergencies Team have made contingency arrangements and put rest centres on a higher state of alert in case of the need to evacuate any buildings. A recent test of rest centre provision has taken place and an extra push to recruit additional volunteers for rest centres has been done and will continue.

Schools

Engagement with schools has taken place and a return to the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) completed by the council on mainstream and controlled schools with four or more storeys, of which there 6 in Leeds. None of these 6 has the type of cladding currently causing concern, however the technical details of the cladding / insulation in each case is being reviewed.

Council officers have also been in contact with three further schools (2 aided and 1 academy) who have more than four storeys to request the details of their ESFA returns that they have submitted individually. Priority levels of these schools will then be assessed accordingly in partnership with the fire service.

In addition to the above, a letter has been sent to all school Head Teachers and Chair of Governors on 29 June to advise them to re-check their fire safety procedures as an extra precaution.

Hospitals

Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust is supplementing its regular and robust fire safety programme with an active and urgent approach in response to concern about fire safety in cladded buildings. According to WYFRS there are no hospital buildings in the region that have the ACM cladding. LTHT have published the results of their review of fire safety and a link to this information has been made available to visitors to the council's website.

Universities

University of Leeds has conducted a range of precautionary investigations and assessments of its buildings with specific focus on external cladding. They have produced a briefing note to update and reassure students, staff and other campus users about the fire safety arrangements which are currently in place at the University and areas where they are taking further action. Leeds Beckett is contacting all of their residential accommodation providers to ensure they are alerted and any necessary testing performed.

Once again, the council has shared this information via its own web pages, to help reassure people that the city is taking a co-ordinated approach to fire safety.

2.5 Lessons learned

While it may take some time to understand the implications of the events of the Grenfell Tower fire completely, it is important that we look to learn lessons together with partners about how the response was handled in Kensington and Chelsea but also in Leeds as we set about reassuring residents and assessing

properties. This action will take time to complete but should be used to strengthen our response arrangements where possible and address any perceived weaknesses or areas for improvement.

2.6 Policy Implications

The events of Grenfell are also highly likely to have policy implications in relation to high rise building and fire safety regulations. This could include changes to building regulations and fire safety requirements that need to be retrofitted to buildings.

It is therefore important that these policy implications are properly discussed and agreed at a national level and discussed with local areas with the regards to implementation. It is however vital that any policy changes are communicated in the correct way, reassuring residents of their immediate safety alongside any programme of change; especially where it is likely to take a significant amount of time and resources to implement.

2.7 Scrutiny Arrangements

Alongside the work of the strategic task group summarised above, it is proposed that the following scrutiny boards be tasked to pick up scrutiny of the relevant actions / emerging issues, subject to the agreement of the recommendation by the Executive Board:

- Strategy and Resources – emergency planning
- infrastructure and Investment – private sector properties and building control
- Environment, Housing and Communities – council housing stock safety, resident engagement and investment decisions

3 Corporate Considerations

3.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 3.1.1 Resident engagement events have taken place across all of the council's high rise blocks to offer residents the opportunity to ask any questions. Residents have also received a number of letters to provide updates on what Leeds is doing in response to the fire. Ward Members have been briefed on the letters sent and details of local engagement within their ward. Now the engagement sessions are complete, feedback will be collated and made available to tenants and to Members.
- 3.1.2 Letters have also been sent to building owners and building managers of private high rise blocks and further engagement will take place as required.
- 3.1.3 A homepage promotion on the council's website links people to full information about fire safety and reassurance. This includes detailed updates

and safety guides for council tenants, information for private tenants and building owners, and updates from the universities and hospitals. It also links to our media statements.

3.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

3.2.1 Further initiatives to mitigate the fire risk across the city will be subject to detailed Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that the most disadvantaged are not adversely impacted and that individual needs and the requirement to make reasonable adjustments where necessary are recognised.

3.2.2 Equality impact considerations are built into the council's own emergency and business continuity management arrangements.

3.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

3.3.1 The vision from the Best Council Plan is for Leeds to be a compassionate, caring city, where we want everyone to be safe and feel safe. In responding to the events of Grenfell Tower it is essential that as a council we do everything possible to make sure residents in high rise buildings are safe and feel that they are safe.

3.4 Resources and value for money

3.4.1 In line with the council value of 'spending money wisely', the council is committed to using its resources in the best possible way in responding to the implications for Leeds of the Grenfell Tower.

3.4.2 Initial resource implications have mainly been in regard to the commitment of teams to respond to the concerns of residents and others. However, depending on the emerging findings of the Grenfell inquiry and any policy changes, there may be further resource implications that the Council will need to consider. The Council will always prioritise safety and find the resources required, however, this will inevitably impact upon other planned improvements to council housing. The Council will engage with government about how these pressures can be managed.

3.4.3 As referenced above, the council also has a medium/long term investment strategy for its social housing stock. This will be reviewed further once the situation is clearer and may result in changes to the existing strategy.

3.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

3.5.1 This report is being submitted to the Board as a late item of business in order to provide the Board with the latest position regarding the Grenfell Tower fire. The report could not be included within the agenda papers as published due to the fast changing nature of the issues, but it was deemed appropriate that the Board were provided with an update regarding such matters at the earliest opportunity.

3.5.2 There are no specific legal implications or access to information issues within this report. However future work in response to the Grenfell Tower fire, and

the recommendations of the subsequent inquiry, may have legal implications which will be addressed appropriately.

3.5.3 The report is subject to call-in.

3.6 Risk Management

3.6.1 All corporate risks, and the action plans in place to mitigate them to an acceptable level, are reviewed on a regular basis and those related to civil contingencies will be updated again in response to recent events.

3.6.2 The council has wide-ranging responsibilities to prevent the risk of health and safety failures that could result in death, injury, legal challenge and significant reputational damage. A range of health and safety controls are in place to manage this risk including adoption of performance standards, employee accountability, audit reviews and an annual action plan which sets out priorities for the year. Within days of the Grenfell Tower fire, our fire safety approach was reviewed with West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and connections being made to any upcoming national guidance.

4 Conclusions

4.1 The tragic events of the Grenfell Tower fire have caused much wider concern about the safety of high rise buildings in all parts of the UK. Whilst the investigation into the causes and response are likely to take some time to become clear, there have been a number of immediate actions required in Leeds to reassure citizens of safety and also to work with partners to address any issues with buildings in the city. This work is likely to continue for a significant period.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Members of Executive Board are recommended to:

- 1) Note progress on delivering the action plan (annex 1) and support ongoing prioritisation of the post-Grenfell work, noting the early implications and issues for consideration
- 2) In relation to the role of scrutiny boards, task the following boards to pick up scrutiny of the relevant actions / emerging issues:

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6 Background documents¹

6.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

Annex 1 – Grenfell Tower Strategic Group Action Log

11-Jul		Grenfell Tower			
No	Date	Action	Owner	Status	Rating
1	19/06/2017	Immediate checks on high rises - information gathering	Housing	Work completed	Completed
2	19/06/2017	Testing of all fire safety systems on the 23 blocks of high rise	Housing	Tests being arranged - but may take up to four months to complete	In progress
3	19/06/2017	Decision on testing low/medium rise blocks following high rise testing	Housing	To be completed following high rise tests - statement to be put together explaining decision	Not started
4	19/06/2017	Communication to All staff/members/partners/MPs	Communications	Initial All staff email completed	Completed
5	19/06/2017	Checks on other high rises through building control team (see also actions 7 + 16)	Building Control	Building control collated a schedule - 'amber' properties with potential cladding prioritised	In progress
6	19/06/2017	Tenant Engagement meetings	Housing	Being organised to take place over next 3 weeks (22/06/17)	In progress
7	19/06/2017	Engagement with private landlords (see also actions 5 + 16)	Building Control	Joint letter communication from WYFRS and LCC sent to property managers, starting with 'amber' properties'	In progress
8	19/06/2017	Liaising with DCLG and understand emerging Whitehall/Westminster policy and action	Chief Executive / Director of Resources and Housing	Chief Exec met with core cities and DCLG 21/06. Building control in direct contact	In progress
9	19/06/2017	Consider our medium/longer term investment strategy for high rise dwellings across the City	Housing	To be reviewed following any lessons learned - early work to be produced on options	Not started
10	19/06/2017	Draw out learning for incident and emergencies	Resilience and Emergencies	Emergency handbook review work to include this	Not started
11	19/06/2017	DCLG return on urgent building checks	Housing	Nil returns completed 26/06	Completed

12	22/06/2017	Complete communication activities (see separate comms plan)	Communications	Communications plan finalised, being implemented	In progress
13	22/06/2017	Schools checks	Children's / PPPU	Schools checks progressed and reporting back to ESFA completed, letters sent to headteachers and parents. Monitoring any further feedback and liaising with academy chains on any buildings that may need testing	In progress
14	26/07/2017	Ensure preparations in place for any potential building evacuation	Resilience and Emergencies	LCC and WYFRS to liaise on evacuation planning. WYFRS to share assessment check list	In progress
15	29/06/2017	Communication to all schools children parents	Children's	Completed and sent	Completed
16	30/07/2017	Monitor and act on responses from private building landlords and managers (see also actions 5 + 7)	WYFRS / Building Control	A number of failed cladding tests already received, assessments carried out and support given where required	In progress