

**Report of**     **Director of Resources and Housing**

**Report to**     **Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)**

**Date:**         **3 October 2018**

**Subject:**     **Update on Inquiry into Leeds' Response to Grenfell**

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input 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. The Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board undertook a scrutiny inquiry into Leeds' response to Grenfell in late 2017. A report was produced in December 2017 outlining the key outcomes of the inquiry and a series of recommendations. These recommendations were considered and agreed at the Scrutiny Board meeting in December 2017.

2. The Council has made considerable progress in implementing the recommendations from the inquiry. Good progress has been made in strengthening communication and engagement with high rise residents, a draft proposal for block champions will be considered by the High Rise Strategy Group in October 2018, a standard suite of information has been rolled out on block noticeboards, handheld technology is being piloted to undertake fire risk assessments with a view to roll out in early 2019, further investment has been made to enhance fire safety in blocks and fire safety checks have been rolled out to medium and low rise flats where cleaning is in place.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to consider the update on progress in implementing the recommendations from the Scrutiny Inquiry into Leeds' response to Grenfell.

## 1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board on progress in implementing the recommendations in the Scrutiny Report on Leeds' response to Grenfell, agreed by the Board in December 2017.

## 2. Background information

- 2.1 Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London on 14 June 2017, Executive Board received a report at its meeting on 17 July outlining the work undertaken by Leeds City Council and partners following the fire to ensure the safety of Leeds residents living in high rise. A recommendation to Executive Board was for the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board to pick up scrutiny of the relevant actions and emerging issues relating to Council housing stock safety, resident engagement and investment decisions.
- 2.2 The Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board held evidence gathering sessions during October 2017 and produced a report in December 2017 outlining the key outcomes of the inquiry and a series of recommendations. These recommendations were considered and agreed at the Scrutiny Board meeting on 4 December 2017.
- 2.3 As part of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Report the Board requested that the Director of Resources and Housing provide regular updates on progress in delivering the recommendations, and in particular work to develop engagement and communications plans for Council high rise tenants.

## 3. Main issues

- 3.1 Progress has been made in delivering the six recommendations as follows:

### 3.2 **Recommendation 1 – Provide regular updates to Scrutiny Board on the ongoing development of engagement and communications plans for high rise residents**

- 3.2.1 Both the High Rise Strategy and Grenfell scrutiny inquiry stressed the importance of improving our engagement and communication practices with residents living in high rise, reflecting the particular tenancy and property related issues unique to this type of accommodation. During 2018 we have sought to strengthen our engagement and communication in a number of ways. There are a number of themes to our Engagement and Communication Plan for residents in High Rise:
- Strategic engagement via High Rise Strategy Group - engagement with a small number of high rise tenants who support the Council in delivering the priorities in the High Rise Strategy.
  - Operational engagement with local tenant and residents groups – working with tenant and resident groups and attending tenant meetings in order to respond to issues in particular blocks and localities.
  - Visibility of officers in blocks – engaging with residents and proactively managing local issues.
  - Improved communication with all residents, sharing more information about the management of high rise and services into blocks.

- Maximising digital communication and engagement opportunities, in order to ensure engagement and communication with a wider number of residents.

- 3.2.2 During 2018, tenants on the High Rise Strategy Group have continued to support the Council in delivering priorities in the High Rise Strategy. This has included contributing towards a review of cleaning standards and quality monitoring, advising on the approach to and content of various resident communications, supporting a review of the block champion role and contributing to various policy and procedure developments.
- 3.2.3 The Council has continued throughout 2018 to work closely with a large number of local tenant groups where they exist in blocks to share information on what the Council is doing to enhance the management of high rise and to respond to any issues which require intervention.
- 3.2.4 Following the Grenfell fire Leeds has strengthened its arrangements for officer presence in high rise blocks to ensure the fire safety of high rise residents. In addition to daily stage one fire safety checks and planned stage two checks, a more robust framework of block sweeps and inspections has been introduced. Housing Officers now undertake weekly sweeps of all blocks (daily for the enhanced management blocks) to identify any urgent tenancy management activity required and make contact with residents on particular issues. Housing Officers also undertake monthly block inspections to identify wider management issues – these inspections are promoted on the block noticeboards and residents are encouraged to attend.
- 3.2.5 Immediately following the Grenfell fire, Housing Leeds held engagement sessions at all Leeds City Council owned high rise blocks across the city to outline what the Council was doing to ensure resident safety and to respond to resident concerns. It was clear from these sessions that many residents were not aware of much of the activity undertaken by the Council to manage high rise or of service standards linked to activities. A key priority during 2018 has been to improve the way that we share information and engage with all residents living in high rise.
- 3.2.6 A programme of further engagement sessions will be undertaken with residents during the autumn / winter 2018/19, with officers visiting blocks to share the follow up work which has been undertaken by the Council with its residents, and future plans.
- 3.2.7 In March 2018 we delivered a newsletter to all high rise residents. While the primary purpose of the newsletter was to provide an update on what Leeds has done following the Grenfell fire to ensure the safety of its residents, the newsletter also outlined progress in delivering the High Rise Strategy actions, and sought to raise resident awareness of activities undertaken by the Council in high rise and service standards. The newsletter was developed in consultation with the High Rise Strategy Group. Positive feedback was received from residents about the newsletter. Further newsletters will be issued on a regular basis to provide updates on any changes linked to high rise; the next newsletter is planned for autumn 2018 to provide updates on planned resident engagement, fire safety work, the block champion role and promoting the STAR Survey.
- 3.2.8 Housing Leeds is seeking to develop its digital engagement and communications with residents in blocks in order to maximise the opportunity to communicate with a wider range of tenants in blocks. A trial has been undertaken to use emails and texting as a way to communicate with residents to promote a block inspection. We are looking to roll this out more widely during late 2018, but taking care to ensure

that residents who don't have access to the internet / texting are not disadvantaged through this approach.

3.2.9 In order to maximise the opportunity for residents to get on line, Leeds City Council has worked closely with internet service providers to seek opportunities to provide free Wi-Fi to residents living in high rise blocks in return for providers installing equipment on the roof of blocks. Housing Leeds has now implemented Wi-Fi pilots in five blocks with a further two blocks planned over the coming months; and is working with residents to access training opportunities where appropriate. One pilot currently being developed will support residents to access training along with equipment to enable internet access.

### **3.3 Recommendation 2 – That work is undertaken to consider the merits of all possible tenant engagement options, including the Block Champion approach**

3.3.1 Housing Leeds, with members of the High Rise Strategy Group, have researched national good practice in relation to the block champion model in high rise, and compared the approaches of ten other social landlords. A proposed model which takes the best practice from other organisations will be considered by tenants at the next High Rise Strategy Group meeting on 15 October.

3.3.2 The key principles of the proposed approach to Block Champions are as follows:

- Making the opportunity available and accessible to a broad range of tenants/leaseholders by ensuring that the role is flexible to accommodate an individual's circumstances.
- Possible roles of a Champion can include the monitoring of cleaning standards, taking part in cleaning and block inspections, reporting repairs to designated contacts, reporting adhoc issues to the service and supporting resident consultation and engagement.
- Block Champions would not have responsibilities linked to managing the health and safety of the block but could support the promotion of health and safety within blocks.
- We would encourage Champions to engage with us digitally, and support the digital agenda (by also being Digital Champions if they wish)
- That the activity adds value by giving us additional feedback about the communal management of the block to complement our own internal management checks and controls and responsibilities as a landlord
- That the role is informal and mutually supportive, to help foster a partnership approach with residents.

3.3.3 Following further engagement with the High Rise Strategy Group, the service will launch the new block champion model as standard offer to all blocks during in November/December 2018 and promote within the next High Rise newsletter.

### **3.4 Recommendation 3 – Ensure that all blocks have communal noticeboards in use by June 2018 to display key information and develop an approach to ensuring that they are effectively kept up to date**

3.4.1 A core suite of 14 posters was developed with the High Rise Strategy Group, including:

- General welcome
- Introducing the Housing Officer – key contact for issues, additional support.
- Common emergency repairs advice
- Communal door entry advice
- Anti-Social Behaviour – advice and key contacts

- Communal cleaning service standards
- Fire Safety information – service standards / expectations
- Getting Involved – key contacts
- Contents Insurance -
- Pets - policy
- Rough Sleepers – how to respond
- Satellites - policy
- Tenancy Fraud Awareness - contacts
- Useful Telephone Numbers

3.4.2 There are some small variations to the core suite dependent on the type of block and information on display is adapted to take into account the different or additional services provided to PFI and sheltered block residents.

3.4.3 The core suite is now on display in all but 15 blocks and plans are in place to roll out the remaining blocks.

3.4.4 In addition to the core suite of posters, the service is currently installing two A4 snap frames in each block to display outcome information from the fire and safety check sheets and updates about planned communal repairs.

3.4.5 The Council is also developing a pilot to use electronic noticeboards in blocks to support engagement and communication with residents, particularly on more urgent issues. As part of the pilot consideration will be given as to how electric noticeboards could be used to provide feedback on the outcomes of fire and safety checks and planned communal repairs.

3.4.6 A central register of all notice boards is now in place, recording the number of notice boards in each block, how they are accessed and a record/photo confirmation that the core suite of posters is on display and up to date. Any future changes to key information will be issued and completion monitored by the Housing Information Team.

### **3.5 Recommendation 4 - Explore investment opportunities for handheld technology to support the undertaking and recording of fire safety checks in high rise blocks**

3.5.1 A business case was developed and approved to work with the Digital Information Service to introduce Total Mobile, a hand held solution for the stage 1 fire safety checks in high and low rise blocks across the city. The relevant forms have been designed and tested on the hand held devices and a trial is currently underway for a wedge of the city with 20 users using the electronic forms for the Stage 1 checks and replacing the paper forms.

3.5.2 The trial is being constantly reviewed and improvements made. The trial is due to conclude at the end of October with a view to undertaking a full roll out across all blocks during early 2019. This technology will supply real time accurate time and date stamped information with the ability to upload photographs of any issues so they can be quickly be identified and addressed.

### **3.6 Recommendation 5 – Ensure further engagement with Scrutiny to consider the impact of the Grenfell national public inquiry on the Council’s Housing Investment Plan**

- 3.6.1 Housing Leeds are closely following the Grenfell national public inquiry and await any conclusions and recommendations which will inform a review of the Council's Housing Investment Plan.
- 3.6.2 Following a proactive approach to fire-safety, Housing Leeds had already prepared a programme to retrospectively fit sprinklers to eight multi-storey high rise sheltered blocks. To expand this initiative to a number of higher risk general needs blocks, £10m has been made available from the capital programme to fund further sprinkler installations. This is progressing well to programme with the work being undertaken by Leeds Building Agency. Good resident engagement with residents in the blocks has led to high access rates and very positive customer satisfaction.
- 3.6.3 An additional 21 multi-storey blocks in Burmantofts, East Leeds, will also have sprinkler systems installed alongside the renewal of the heating systems as part of the 'Leeds Pipes' district heating installation. Initial customer liaison has shown this to be a welcomed addition to the scheme.
- 3.6.4 As the capital programme continues to progress, 'fire stopping' works have been undertaken to around 97% of high rise properties to re-establish the compartmentation of the building. This in addition to fire signage, planned fire door replacements and replacement of high risk hopper heads on waste chutes.

**3.7 Recommendation 6 – Ensure that further engagement is undertaken with Scrutiny Board regarding fire safety standards linked medium and low rise Council housing stock**

- 3.7.1 Housing Management, Civic Enterprise Leeds and LCC's Fire Safety Manager worked together to introduce stage 1 fire safety checks for all low and medium rise flats which receive a cleaning service from January 2018. Blocks receive a check each day that they are cleaned and any issues are reported through to the housing office for action. Stage 2 fire safety checks are undertaken at least once every 6 months by Housing Office staff, although each block is risk assessed and some are checked more frequently.

**4. Corporate considerations**

**4.1 Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1.1 The High Rise Strategy Group is a group of tenants who meet with Council on a regular basis to influence the way that services are provided to residents in Council owned high rise homes and to support the Council in effectively delivering the High Rise Strategy. The group have had an important role in supporting the Council's response to Grenfell – two members attended the inquiry's evidence gathering sessions during October 2017 and highlighted issues from a tenant's perspective, and the group has supported the implementation of the Scrutiny Board inquiry recommendations.
- 4.1.2 A number of the Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations focus on increasing engagement and communication with residents living in high rise. The report outlines progress made in delivering each of the themes of the engagement and communication plan.
- 4.1.3 The Council is planning to undertake the biannual Survey of Tenants And Residents (STAR) in autumn 2018. As part of the survey, an increased sample size will be undertaken of high rise residents in order for the results to be used to evaluate resident satisfaction with services on a block by block basis.

## **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

- 4.2.1 A key priority of the resident engagement and communications to high rise residents is to maximise communication and engagement with as many residents in high rise blocks as possible. Housing Leeds has therefore sought to ensure a range of different communication and engagement methods, with an increased focus on digital methods.
- 4.2.2 Following the initial resident engagement sessions after the Grenfell fire we received some feedback from residents that language was a barrier to this engagement in some areas of the city where there a significant proportion of residents have limited English.
- 4.2.3 Since the engagement sessions Housing Leeds has collated a list of community and voluntary organisations who provide services / support to residents in the Little London, Lincoln Green and Burmantofts areas, where the greatest number of languages are spoken. Housing Leeds is able to use this network of contacts to be able to share key messages and encourage / request these groups signpost language support or help us relay key messages. We have good working relationships with local community groups, for example, Housing Officers in the Little London team work closely with Bahar Womens Association (who also meet at the Little London Community Centre) that informally support translation activity.
- 4.2.4 In planning future engagement and communications consideration will be given to how we can engage with these community organisations to support our engagement.

## **4.3 Council policies and best council plan**

- 4.3.1 The Council's response to Grenfell supports a number of the Best City priorities. It supports the Housing theme of ensuring that housing is of high quality and the Safe, Strong Communities themes of keeping people safe from harm, protecting the most vulnerable, being responsive to local needs, building thriving, resilient communities and promoting community respect and resilience.

## **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 It is of major importance to the Council to ensure the safety of its residents living in high rise homes. Resources have been made available through the existing Housing Revenue Account budget to deliver the recommendations from the Grenfell Scrutiny inquiry.
- 4.4.2 Once the conclusions and recommendations of the Grenfell Scrutiny Inquiry are known, consideration will be given to the resources needed to deliver on recommendations via the Council Housing Investment Plan and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

## **4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in**

- 4.5.1 There are no specific legal implications related to the content of this report.

## **4.6 Risk management**

- 4.6.1 A High Rise Implementation Plan and risk register are in place to monitor the delivery of strategy actions and manage risk in relation to the delivery of the High Rise Strategy. The recommendations following this scrutiny inquiry are outlined within the implementation plan and risks considered as part of the risk register.
- 4.6.2 Progress in delivering the implementation plan and the risk register are monitored by the High Rise Strategy Board, a Board with representation from Chief Officers of services which have a role in delivering the High Rise Strategy.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 Significant progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from the Scrutiny report. Progress will continue to be monitored by Housing Leeds to ensure the full completion of all actions and progress monitored by the High Rise Strategy Board.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Members are asked to consider the update on progress in implementing the recommendations from the Scrutiny Inquiry into Leeds' response to Grenfell.

## **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> 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.