

Title: Grenfell Tower Phase 2 report – impact on Leeds City Council

Author: Simon Baker

Meeting Date: 22nd January 2025

1. Background

- 1.1. In the early hours of June 14, 2017, in North Kensington, West London, a fire broke out in a fourth-floor flat of the 24-story Grenfell Tower and rapidly spread to engulf the entire building.
- 1.2. The fire claimed the lives of 72 people, making it the deadliest residential fire in the UK since World War II.
- 1.3. The primary factor contributing to the rapid spread of the fire was the flammable cladding material installed on the exterior of the building. This cladding, combined with other safety failures, allowed the fire to quickly climb the building's façade.
- 1.4. A public inquiry was established to investigate the circumstances surrounding the fire and to make recommendations to prevent similar tragedies in the future.
- 1.5. The Inquiry published its first – 'Phase 1' report – on October 30, 2019. It focused on the events leading up to and during the fire on. It detailed the fire's origin and rapid spread, emphasising the role of the combustible cladding system in the disaster and criticising the response of the London Fire Brigade (LFB), highlighting issues such as communication failures, inadequate training, and the delayed evacuation order.
- 1.6. The report made numerous recommendations to improve fire safety in high-rise buildings, including stricter building regulations, enhanced training for firefighters, and improved emergency response procedures.
- 1.7. On September 4th, 2024, the Inquiry published its Phase 2 report, the purpose of which was to look more deeply at the systemic failures that led to the fire. It aims to:
 - Uncover the fundamental reasons behind the fire, including issues with building regulations, construction practices, and regulatory oversight
 - Determine responsibility for the decisions and actions that contributed to the disaster
 - Propose comprehensive measures to prevent similar tragedies in the future, such as stricter building standards, improved fire safety regulations, and enhanced accountability mechanisms
- 1.8. The Phase 2 report contains 58 recommendations, and all have been assessed for any potential impact on Leeds City Council. This report outlines the findings of the assessment.

2. Main Points

- 2.1. Firstly, it is important to note that in its recommendations the report doesn't make any explicit recommendations for social housing providers in terms of the condition of its housing stock or other landlord services.
- 2.2. Whilst the report makes a number of criticisms about how the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), who had landlord responsibilities at the time of the fire, carried out those responsibilities (for example in relation to complaint handling, remedying defects identified in fire risk assessments, installing and maintaining fire protection systems and routine inspection and maintenance of fire doors), the report says:

...shortcomings of those kinds would probably have led us to make a number of recommendations directed to ensuring that they were rectified and not repeated. However, since the fire Parliament has enacted the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, which enables the Regulator of Social Housing to play a more active role in setting appropriate standards and ensuring that they are met. The regulator also has the power to set standards on the competence and conduct of those involved in the provision of services relating to the management of social housing and to require providers of social housing to make information available both to tenants and the regulator. The Act also makes safety a priority and imposes a duty on landlords to investigate and remedy within a specified time of being reported defects that may adversely affect health... In those circumstances, we do not consider it necessary to make any additional recommendations in relation to the matters that we have uncovered.

- 2.3. The Leeds Housing Board receives regular updates on our progress in meeting the new regulatory regime, how we are working towards full compliance with the Consumer Standards and the work done by the Social Housing Regulations project.
- 2.4. The report makes recommendations across a number of areas which do not directly impact on, or do not require any immediate response from, Leeds City Council. Examples of these include:
 - The establishment of a national regulator for the construction industry
 - That the government bring responsibility for fire safety (currently spread across a number of departments) into one department under a single Secretary of State
 - A licensing scheme be introduced for contractors
 - A number of recommendations for the London Fire Brigade and fire services across the country
 - A review of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004

3. Phase 2 report impact on LCC

- 3.1. There are a number of recommendations in the report that potentially have an impact on LCC.
- 3.2. A number relate to changes to building regulations; the report recommends that the definition of a higher-risk building be changed from a building above 18m to one that reflects the use of the building and the presence of

vulnerable people for whom evacuation in the event of fire could be difficult. Changes are recommended to building regulations which are designed to strengthen compliance. These, if implemented, will affect LCC-owned properties and impacts will be managed accordingly.

- 3.3. The report is critical of the 'stay-put' strategy in place at Grenfell Tower and recommends that buildings are assessed and stay-put guidance is issued only when a building is assessed as having negligible risk of fire spreading via an external wall. LCC has plans in place to ensure our buildings are suitably assessed.
- 3.4. There are a number of recommendations related to a building's fire safety strategy and the status and accreditation of fire engineers and fire risk assessors. LCC is exploring how to meet the recommendations, including potentially recruiting a suitably qualified fire engineer and that LCC fire risk assessors become suitably accredited.
- 3.5. There are a number of recommendations within the report which consider how local authorities' emergency and resilience functions manage people who have been displaced from their homes by a major incident, how staff are suitably trained, how the information of displaced people is accurately recorded, how displaced people are placed in temporary accommodation, financial assistance available for displaced people, and how displaced people are kept informed. LCC's Resilience and Emergencies Team has reviewed the recommendations and is working towards meeting them.

4. Progress made in Leeds

- 4.1. Since the fire, in its aftermath a lot of work has been done in Leeds to meet the requirements that have come from government, including via the Building Safety Act, and the Inquiry's findings.
- 4.2. With regards to fire safety specifically:
 - Since the Grenfell Tragedy, work continues to review and monitor all fire risk assessments for our social housing in a structured and programmed manner.
 - Following the Dame Hackitt Phase 1 inquiry, the Council is an 'early adopter' of the Hackitt review recommendations. Work with the West Yorks Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) has completed, produced, and placed on site Tactical Information Plans for 121 High Rise blocks seven storeys and above or 18+ meters in height. These documents must be maintained and updated when works are carried out in any of these blocks and any changes reported to WYFRS.
 - Passive Fire Protection works (Fire stopping) and the compartmentalisation of flats in high rise blocks across the city have been completed further enhancing resident safety. These assessments include invasive audits of fire safety compartmentation.
 - LCC continues to work closely with WYFRS through partnership agreements and the Concordat agreement further enhancing fire safety.

- Working on Evacuation procedures with regards detailing persons that require assistance to evacuate are ongoing with WYFRS, benefiting all our High-Rise residents citywide. Where a residents has self-referred, we schedule in a Person Centred Fire Risk Assessment.
 - The programme of sprinkler installation, which started in 2013 in High Rise blocks citywide, is continuing and 70 High Rise blocks with four currently work in progress which will be completed by financial year 2024/25, providing the highest safety provision to the residents of Leeds.
 - The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 article 6 was amended in 2022 and our fire risk assessors must report on the structure of walls, their external wall insulations and items such as balconies etc. This allows the Local Fire Authority as the enforcing body to enforce matters in relation to any issues noted.
 - The Fire Safety Regulations 2022 that came into force on January 23rd, 2023, places a duty on the Authority to check the High Rise flat entrance doors of all accommodation – 7000-plus. The results of these checks must be recorded; a web-based Door App was design and developed, where project progress is recorded supporting our KPIs and TSMs. In addition, all communal areas have door inspections every three months. Included in the project is testing our residents’ smoke alarms, if any defects are identified immediate repairs are raised.
 - Educational leaflets are sent to all High Rise residents, 7000-plus, on the importance of their Flat Entrance Doors and the Evacuation Strategy for each High Rise block citywide.
 - It also requires that we inspect and test lifts on a monthly basis, to test all firefighter functions work, and any failure that takes over 24 hours to repair must be passed to local Fire Authority with the fault and a remedy date.
 - High Rise wayfinding signage project surveys, artwork, manufacture and installations has commenced, and we estimate the planned completion to be 2026.
- 4.3. Work done on wider building safety in Leeds includes:
- A project team was established 2023 to assess the impact of the Building Safety Act 2022 and develop proposals to meet the requirements of the new legislation.
 - The recommendations of the project were to create structural changes to services within Property Management (now Asset Management Housing).
 - Posts were created in the Fire Safety Team, M&E team and a Building Safety Team was created.
 - As part of the project it was identified that creating ‘block champions’ would enable officers to become experts on each block. The ‘Stage 3’ quarterly block inspections of the communal areas were brought under the Building Safety Team, undertaken by Technical Officers.
 - The legislation has required Housing Leeds to register all blocks 18m+/7 storeys and above with the Building Safety Regulator.

- All registered High Risk Buildings (HRB) will go through an assessment by the Building Safety Regulator in order to receive a Building Occupation Certificate (BOC).
- IDS developed a Building Safety Hub as an online source of relevant information on building and flat safety for all residents.
- IDS developed a SharePoint system to manage the Golden Thread of information required to be stored for each HRB
- A Mandatory Occurrence Reporting System (MOR) has been developed and rolled out for all building users to report building safety concerns
- Resident Engagement plans have been developed for each block
- Refurbishment projects, within HRB, now need to meet a more stringent approval process and can only be approved by the Building Safety Regulator.

5. Discussion Point

- 5.1. Does the Board have any comments on LCC's response to the Grenfell Tower Phase 2 report?

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. Members are asked to note the content of the report and comment accordingly.