

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3 January 2019

ST PETERS COURT – FIRE SAFETY UPDATE (REP1853)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In November 2017 officers presented a report to Overview and Scrutiny committee in regard to the Council's response to fire safety in the tower block St Peters Court, following the tragic event at Grenfell Towers in June 2017.
2. As part of the November 2017 Overview and Scrutiny report, members made a request for an annual update to be provided in regard to ongoing fire safety within the building.
3. It is the intention of this report to update members of further improvements made or planned to be made to the building, and the controls implemented to enhance fire safety within.
4. Whilst some areas of fire safety will be specific projects with a start and end date, most will be ongoing now and in future and subject to ongoing servicing, inspection, maintenance, and learning.

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| Is the report Open or Exempt? | Open |
| Wards Affected: | Harbour |
| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Chris Punt, Cabinet Member for Housing |
| Supporting Officer: | John Brown Housing Maintenance Manager 01502 523592 john.brown@eastsoffolk.gov.uk |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In order to deliver on our commitments to tenants and residents following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, and completing recommendations of the fire risk assessment undertaken on 27th July 2017, considerable and significant amounts of work have, or are, being undertaken to St Peters Court. Whilst some aspects of the works are as a direct consequence of Fire Risk Assessment recommendations, others are resulting from the acceleration of ongoing planned improvements to the building consistent with Capital works generally to the Housing portfolio to improve and modernise homes for tenants. Listed below are areas of work completed, underway, or planned that specifically relate to fire safety and demonstrates the Council's commitment to resident's safety.

1.2 Installation of a full category L4 fire detection system throughout the building

The 2017 Fire Risk Assessment made specific comment to increasing fire detection within the building. Works to increase the detection coverage to a category 4 system providing detection in all common parts and fire escapes throughout the building were completed in March 2018. This complete system is linked to the fully addressable fire panel which alerts the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service via a third party call handling centre allowing them to swiftly attend the site. Being linked to the addressable panel, detectors will highlight exactly within the building where an incident is occurring, again allowing a swift response to the point of concern.

1.3 Replacement of automatic bin chute shutter plate and mechanism

A damaged bin chute shutter mechanism had been identified at the 2017 FRA having been hit and buckled by a severe force from the refuse chute. The damaged and buckled plate could not operate correctly and form a good seal around the base of the refuse chute in the case of fire. The work to replace this damaged plate was undertaken by a specialist company and completed on 10/10/2017.

1.4 Replacement of all flat entrance door sets with new FD60 fire doors

Works to replace flat entrance doors were programmed with a view to modernising internal living conditions for residents and as such did not result from any specific fire risk assessment. Comment however was made within the 2017 FRA in regard to the need for fire safe letter boxes. Noting the expense that would have occurred to replace all existing letter plates it was decided to accelerate the replacement door programme minimising needless expenditure. The replacement of doors with new FD60 (1 hour) doors (instead of the planned FD30) came as a direct request from members wishing to enhance compartmentation. The replacement of doors has removed the previous letterbox aperture causing concern, new external letter boxes have now been installed to maintain the integrity of the fire door barrier. At the point of report writing (18/12) only 6 flats remain outstanding for new doors to be fitted.

1.5 Replacement of two communal doors to each floor with new fire doors

The replacement of two communal doors to each floor is again planned works and not resulting from any specific FRA action. The door to the fire escape stairwell and adjoining corridor are fire doors and fitted at build in 1968. The replacement of these doors is simply to modernise and improve the internal appearance. Doors are planned to be installed from January 2019 and following completion of flat entrance doors in December 2018.

1.6 Replacement of window reveals throughout the building with a fire retardant board

Previous FRAs have been specific to common parts of the building, and each FRA comments on the need to ensure internal flat compartmentation remains intact.

The flats are constructed such as to provide fire safety within for a 1 hour period, and supports the 'stay put policy' in place, and as agreed with SFRS. For this policy to operate correctly the full compartmentation must be intact without breeches to walls, floors or ceilings. This creates an ongoing need to ensure full fire stopping takes place following any works that penetrate the fire barrier components.

The recommendations to undertake more invasive compartmentation surveys have been acted upon and a registered Fire Engineer engaged to look at properties that have been presented as vacant.

Initial investigations identified two areas of concern, firstly that the windows when installed in 2001 had created a gap at the head of the lounge window only, secondly that all window apertures had been sealed with non fire retardant expanding foam. To rectify this issue every window reveal within the building was removed, non fire-rated foam has been removed and replaced with the correct fire rated foam and covered with fire retardant board. This action has provided a double layer of protection in the case of fire, and stops fire spread from any window apertures directly to the underside of the cladding system.

1.7 Installation of a full fire safety sprinkler system to each unit of accommodation

It is recognised by all fire safety specialists that the one single biggest benefit to tackling fires and providing protection is the installation of a full fire sprinkler system. Cabinet Members committed to undertaking this work during 2017, however, due to the value of works required a full OJEU tendering exercise was required. Following the OJEU tendering process the appointment of a contractor initially proved difficult. This coupled with the fact that there is a high demand for such installations post Grenfell meant works only commenced at St Peters Court in November 2018. A full installation has been installed within a vacant flat and a resident's day held on the 12th November providing opportunity to view the installation and comment. Additionally, both members of the Suffolk Fire and Rescue team and Building Control Officers were invited, to ensure a collaborative and agreeable approach is achieved.

The initial programme of works is planned for a thirty three (33) week duration and will be completed around June 2019. Installation has commenced at the 15th floor and will be in conjunction with new water storage tanks planned to be fitted in early 2019. Once new storage tanks are installed all completed floors will have live systems, reducing ongoing risk within the building.

The activation of any fire sprinkler head is also linked in to the main fire panel, again providing information to the Fire Service of exactly where in the building an incident is taking place.

1.8 On site management control

A key control measure in regard to fire safety within the building relates to general house keeping and prompt reporting of repairs required. Opportunity was taken by the Housing Management team to review the job description of the on-site caretaker, and provide training in regard to general fire safety. Duties are now documented within the revised job description that include weekly checks of fire door seals, door closures, extinguisher servicing, fire signage,

mains electrical cupboards remain free of stored items and that the external Gerda fire box is maintained with up to date and relevant information.

Additionally, documented weekly tests of the emergency lights and alarm system are undertaken, and daily checks to ensure fire escape routes and communal landings remain free of any stored items.

Audits that these actions are completed are undertaken by the Senior Housing Officer.

1.9 Fire Risk Assessment 2018

A Fire Risk Assessment was undertaken to the building on the 28th November by a registered Fire Engineer suitably qualified to review tower blocks. A copy of the final report will be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 3rd January 2019. A draft report has been received which recognises works are still ongoing, it is pleasing to note that the overall risk level has fallen from the 2017 'significant' classification to one of 'tolerable' the second lowest risk classification after trivial. Whilst the findings of this report are pleasing and recognise the effort and expenditure undertaken, it is accepted that works in progress must be seen through to satisfactory completion and on site vigilance must remain high.

1.10 Fire Service Exercises

Additional to physical work undertaken, we continue to work closely with the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and have facilitated 'on site' safety exercises on 5/12/2017 and 9/1/2018.

2. FURTHER WORKS PLANNED

2.1 External cladding investigations

Fire Risk Assessments are somewhat subjective and recognise a single individual's assessment of risk. Experience has shown this to differ from assessor to assessor previously. To protect the Council as far as is reasonably practicable we have deliberately tried to work in partnership with a number of specialist areas, a registered high rise Fire Engineer, colleagues at Suffolk Fire and Rescue, and Building Control colleagues. One specific issue, (the external cladding system) has been a topic of debate and is subject to slightly differing views. Records are held of the system installed in 2001, along with Building Control records ensuring installation criteria was met. **The material and installation are completely different from the system installed at Grenfell Tower.**

One view of the risk posed from the cladding is extremely low on the basis that information is held in regard the product, the installation method, and Building Control records of inspection. The cladding insulation is fully encased externally, and will not be subject to fire spread from within, due to other measures completed (covered above). The original installation required the insertion of fire barriers horizontally above each floor and would have been subject to Building Control sign off.

An alternative view posed by SFRS at a meeting on the 23rd November 2018 is that the product actually fitted may differ from that believed fitted, installation methods cannot be guaranteed when Building Control were not available.

To satisfy all parties and provide reassurance, work will be commissioned early in 2019 to view random sample areas and installation methods as directed by the Fire Engineer. This has been

referred to in the 2018 draft Fire Risk Assessment under item 5. A report specifically in regard to the material, installation methods and presence of fire stops will be produced at this point.

2.2 Further Compartmentation Surveys

Due to the invasive nature of compartmentation surveys only three void properties have currently been viewed and inspected to this degree. The learning from these investigations has been applied throughout the building. None the less it remains the intention to undertake further invasive surveys to more void properties as and when presented to ensure consistency throughout the building. The number of further surveys needed, will be informed by findings, if no additional concerns are raised to those already addressed, surveys numbers will be limited based on the professional advice from the Fire Engineer.

3. HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?

- 3.1 The East Suffolk Business Plan states that the Councils will work closely with our partners in health, education, police and the voluntary, community and business sectors, as well as recognising that the health and safety of our residents is important. The management of fire safety within St Peters Court relates to these objectives of the Business Plan.

4. FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. This high rise block is a Housing Revenue Account building and all works are funded directly from the account.

5. OTHER KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 This report is constructed to provide information only of progress made in regard to fire safety. No additional key issues have been identified.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Housing team are in constant contact with our tenants advising of works proposed and seeking suitable access to their homes. All tenants were written to and invited to attend an empty flat on the 12th November following the first sprinkler installation providing them with an opportunity to view and comment on the installation and provide an insight to the visual appearance.

7. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 This report recommends that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review all actions identified as being complete, in progress or planned, providing comment on the appropriateness of these and identify any further actions they deem fit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note all the works undertaken, in progress or planned for the building in order to protect tenants and residents safety in the event of fire.
2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide direction of any additional actions believed necessary.

APPENDICES

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| Appendix A | The November 2018 Fire Risk Assessment will be circulated prior to the meeting and is likely to be dealt with in the confidential section of the Agenda. |
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None