



Report to Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 6th July 2017

Report of: Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services

Subject: Fire Safety on Council High Rise Residential Blocks

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Summary:

This report provides members with confirmed information relating to the Grenfell Fire in London and how information from this disaster is being responded to so that customers living in high rise accommodation in Sheffield can be reassured their homes are safe and they feel supported.

Key points:

- There are 24 council owned blocks over six storeys in the city
- Two other blocks over 6 storeys are owned by Registered Social Housing Providers in the city.
- One block Hanover (as at 26th June) has failed the BRE cladding test
- All blocks are being sampled to check the cladding material and the results will be made public
- South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service have inspected our blocks including Hanover and have deemed them to be safe to occupy
- The Fire Service have also reiterated the message to residents at public meetings with housing staff that the Stay Put policy is still applicable taking into account the fire precaution measures we have on our blocks.
- A series of public meetings for each estate with tower blocks has commenced to provide information and answer questions
- Letters have been sent to customers and fire safety measures have been reissued.
- As an interim measure additional estates staff / security staff are working out of hours
- A public commitment has been given to install sprinklers on all blocks and for residents to be involved in those discussions

The report has been requested by Cllr Christine Peace.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	X
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note how the reported issues and factors from the Grenfell fire apply to the blocks in Sheffield, what action has been taken by the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services to ensure residents of high rise blocks in Sheffield are safe.

Be aware that new information is emerging on a daily basis regarding fire safety nationally and be assured that Sheffield is working closely with South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services (SYFR) and the Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure we comply with all relevant regulations.

The committee will be given a verbal up date on the issues at the meeting.

Background Papers:

Not applicable

Category of Report: OPEN (please specify)

Report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services

Fire Safety Council High Rise Accommodation

1. Introduction/Context

The Grenfell tower block fire in London on 14th June 2014 has confirmed a high number of fatalities, many people were injured and people lost their homes. This is by far the worst incident in recent times affecting a Local Authority owned property. This means that all LAs in the UK are now going through all of their designs of high rise property to ensure they are safe. A full investigation into the fire has been commissioned by the Government and this may make some recommendations that we need to consider in future.

At this stage the police have confirmed the source of the fire was a faulty fridge freezer and an investigation into the cause is ongoing. The reasons for the speed at which the fire took hold of the building and why it was so difficult for the Fire Service to bring it under control are still being investigated but a factor causing significant anxiety is whether the external cladding to the block was safe.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) announced on 18th June that local authorities should undertake an assessment of all blocks above 6 storeys to establish if the cladding material contains an Asbestos Composite Material (ACM) and if this is identified it should be submitted for testing to the BRE.

Sheffield has complied with all requests from CLG to supply information on its tower blocks including submitting samples from one tower block Hanover where an ACM was suspected in the rain screen cladding following new information supplied by the sub-contractor who installed the cladding. We are taking steps to provide information to residents in the area. We have completed as instructed by CLG an emergency fire safety review of all blocks.

2. Sheffield Tower Blocks

Sheffield has 24 Tower Blocks that are managed by the Housing and Neighbourhood Service which are located across the city. There are 1345 flats, 945 are one beds and the remaining are two bed roomed.

The highest number of storeys being 15 floors (4 blocks) compared to 24 storeys in Grenfell. Most blocks in Sheffield are 12 storeys high. We have 20 blocks with 2 communal emergency fire escape staircases and 4 with one communal emergency fire escape staircase.

Making sure that tenants and leaseholders are safe is a priority for me and the service. Since the early 1990's significant investment has taken place to all 24 blocks in terms of improving the blocks and spending millions putting in place measures that minimise fire risk which has been commended by the SYFRS.

All tower blocks are now externally clad with fire break measures located behind the cladding, the fire breaks give 1 hour protection from smoke and fire. Compartmentation in all flats has taken place and work to the risers to stop fire spreading between properties & floors has been undertaken. Hard wired smoke alarms are also fitted.

The Cladding:

The fire has shown through media coverage that it melted very quickly. All of our blocks have been externally clad but we have not used the same system / products as Grenfell.

The Stannington Tower Blocks (3 in total) have a brick cladding system. The Deer Park blocks have timber windows and the brick cladding is supported off metal angle irons and is attached to the original exterior ring beam thus preventing the spread of fire.

21 of the blocks have a metal rain-screen cladding system although externally different across estates the main design features are the same.

The structure which attaches the cladding to the original concrete external structure of the tower block is metal, the cladding and the fire resistant insulation material is fire retardant which gives 1 hour protection from smoke and fire, the cladding then encloses this. The rain screen clad blocks have windows and external structure that are fixed as part of a sealed unit to the cladding and metal structure. This means that fire cannot spread between the cladding unit and the external tower block structure.

All aspects of the design and materials is to current British Standards and fully compliant with fire regulation regulatory authority.

When the cladding was installed all ventilation passageways and, compartmentation was carried out thus creating floors and walls around flats so that if a fire occurred it could be contained in a single flat and would not spread to adjacent flats or upper and lower floors.

Effectively the package work we have done on tower blocks means each flat is a fire proof box.

Hanover Block

News was received late on 25th June from the Building Research Establishment that confirmed that one element of the external cladding has failed the new fire tests on this block. Although we have not completed the sampling of the other blocks all other blocks where a sample has been taken do not appear to be an ACM that needs to be submitted to the BRE. We are however having these samples independently tested to confirm the visual assessment that they are a solid aluminium sheet.

We are working as quickly as possible to remove the external cladding element from Hanover block, work commenced on 27th June by our in house contractor.

South Yorkshire Fire Service carried out an assessment of the block and are satisfied that homes on Hanover remain safe to live in whilst the cladding removal work is undertaken due to the additional fire measures that are in place within this tower block. These measures include dry risers, hard wired fire detection, fire doors fitted to the front door, fire seals to front doors and within communal area there are fire doors fitted.

Further security arrangements are in place on the Hanover tower block on a 24/7 basis to reassure customers and maintain vigilance on the block in case of fire.

We have met with residents and staff are knocking on doors and dealing with customer's questions and providing clarity on the Stay Put procedure. We have offered to rehouse any resident on a temporary basis, if they feel unhappy to remain whilst the cladding is removed. No-one is being asked to leave the block. A meeting with residents is planned for 28th June and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue will be in attendance.

Stay Put Policy:

Housing operate a 'Stay Put' policy for tenants so that if a fire occurs they remain in their home. All flats have 30 minute fire doors and self closing door closers. Combined with 30 hour communal fire doors and fire precaution works homes have 1 hour fire protection.

Following further discussion with the Fire Service we believe this is the safest way to manage the evacuation of flats if a fire occurs and is in line with national guidance. This has been clearly communicated at public meetings and the Fire Service has been questioned by the public in all meetings to date. The disadvantage of spontaneous evacuation from blocks has been explained.

The Stay Put policy is regularly communicated to tenants and leaseholders, so they know what to do if a fire occurs and we avoid tenants and leaseholders walking into dense smoke.

In the light of the Grenfell fire disaster we have produced a Stay Put poster that is displayed in all ground floor areas. We will review the Fire Safety leaflet with customers and the fire service in the near future following feedback that the information was confusing in places.

Sprinklers:

- We have one sheltered tower block that has sprinklers installed (part-funded from Working in close partnership with the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (BAFSA) and South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (SYFRS), as a retro fitting pilot. This is serviced annually and was done October 2016.
- We do have a number of low rise non-traditional property types in city that have sprinklers to ensure we have a safe means of dealing with fire/ escape because of their design and construction

- All high rise sheltered accommodation has sprinklers installed (one tower block) other low rise sheltered schemes have misting or a sprinkler system in individual flats where vulnerability has been identified.
- As part of the Housing Investment Programme we are bringing forward the installation of sprinklers in high risk tower blocks. The detailed designs have not been commissioned yet and we need to get the right system for each block and ensure we only appoint accredited installers to undertake this important fire safety work. It will take a few months to undertake the designs and resident consultation.
- Currently sprinklers are not required by legislation in England and have not been identified by the annual risk assessments undertaken. As part of the Grenfell Fire investigation there is significant expectation the government will adopt many of the recommendations from the Lakanal House fire in 2009 and make sprinklers compulsory.
- Sheffield does not intend to wait for legislation to be enacted.

Tower Block Management & Inspection:

- All tower blocks have an annual fire risk assessment, externally managed by PFM.
- Managers meet monthly to review that all actions from risk assessments are progressed.
- Our Housing staff do formal fire risk checks six weekly and we have staff in blocks daily to check they are safe and nothing is obstructing the safe means of escape. We have H+ officers visiting tenants and, other council staff who have a referral process in place if issues are identified.
- We do have issues in some blocks with waste but we have estate officers telling tenants to move it or move it outside of blocks on a daily basis (we recharge when we have evidence and tackle through breach of tenancy conditions).
- All blocks have hard-wired fire alarms in individual flats and some blocks have CCTV as well. A 24 Hour H&S on call service has been commissioned by HNS for a number of years which will continue.
- Servicing of dry risers and emergency lighting systems is undertaken routinely.
- SYFRS undertake random unannounced inspections of all our blocks.

We have worked closely for years with the Council's Health & Safety team and SYFRS and all of our policies are in line or go beyond what is expected of us. Sheffield has been commended nationally for the prioritisation of Fire Risk work and applying this across its Housing Investment Programme and, management practices.

Communications:

Tenants are concerned about their safety so we are increasing our visibility and ensuring that tower blocks are free from waste and vehicle access is not impeded. We are also doing the following:

- Providing an update of the situation and guidance on social media, Council website and, through a communication to TARAs

- We have written to all tenants and leaseholders who live in a tower block with information to re-assure them and, information about what to do in case of a fire.
- We are attending public meetings with South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, the forward plan is below.

Tower Block Fire Safety Information Meetings:

These sessions provide the opportunity to meet with the Council's officers and fire safety experts to answer any questions.

Tenant & Residents from the following areas	Date	Venue	Time	Status
Gleadless Valley – Callow Tower Blocks	21 st June, 2017	Terry Wright Community Centre	5.15-6.15 6.30-7.30	Complete – Approx 17 members of the public attended
Stannington Tower Blocks Members Meeting	26 th June, 2017	Deer Park, Hall Park Head Meeting Room	5.15-6.15 6.30-7.30 5.00-6.00	Complete – Approx 20 members of the public attended
Netherthorpe Tower Blocks	27 th June, 2017	Adamfield Mtg room	5.15-6.15 6.30-7.30	
Upperthorpe Tower Blocks	28 th June, 2017	Burlington Mtg Room	5.15-6.15 6.30-7.30	
Hanover Tower Block	26 th June 29 th June, 2017	Hanover Tower Block Meeting Room	4-9pm Drop In Session held 5.15-6.15 6.30-7.30	Complete Approx 15 members of the public attended
Leverton Tower Block	21 st June, 2017 4 th July 2017	Leverton Tower Block Meeting Room Lansdowne Mtg room	10am 5.15-6.15 6.30-7.30	Completed – Approx 9 members of the public attended

Housing Association, University and Private Sector Housing Tower Blocks:

Each organisation is responsible for making sure that their tower blocks are safe and follow national guidance. We have shared our communications with them and providing any support requested. Our regulation obligations will only apply if they fail to follow any changes to Health and Safety Act or Fire Safety regulations and policy.

We are writing as a Council to all these organisations to ask them to confirm:

- what action they have taken to assess the fire safety of their blocks and protect the building occupiers
- what results have been obtained from any testing that has been undertaken
- What action they are going to take to improve fire safety where negative results / assessments have been established.

3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- 3.1 The Council owns 1300 flats that occupy high rise blocks above 6 storeys in Sheffield. The majority of accommodation are one bed roomed flats with approximately 30% of homes being two bed roomed and occupied by small families.

The Grenfell fire in London resulted in significant deaths and residents losing their homes. Following the fire 60 other blocks across the country have been deemed to have unsafe rain screen cladding and where the block has been deemed unsafe hundreds of families have been temporarily rehoused. Many more customers nationally will be affected by living in homes that require essential works.

In Sheffield the significant investment in fire safety work over a number of years has meant that at the time of writing **no residents have been required to move into temporary accommodation.**

We are offering the option to move on a temporary basis to residents in Hanover. Requests from vulnerable customers on other blocks will be considered on a case by case basis.

We will maintain a regular presence on the Hanover block throughout this uncertain period whilst the cladding is removed.

We will consult with residents affected on our plans to install new cladding on Hanover and sprinklers to all tower blocks.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to take note of the actions taken / plans to progress by the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service Sheffield in response to the Grenfell tower block disaster.
- 4.2 Sheffield has carried out significant fire precaution works to its tower blocks as part of the Housing Investment Programme and, have worked closely with Health & Safety colleagues and, SYFRS so we are confident

that the risk to tenants living in tower blocks is low and is being managed.

- 4.3 In advance of more information coming from the incident we are double checking all of the works and material used as part of previous Tower Block refurbishment programmes, we are taking samples of materials to submit these for testing to make sure they are fully compliant and any risks identified.
- 4.4 In the short term we are increasing management inspections to reduce risks and, re-assure tenants with higher than normal officer visibility. We are in touch with the local tenants groups.
- 4.5 Once the investigation into this incident is complete additional precautions may be recommended from the Fire Service. At this stage we will carry out a further review of the Tower Blocks and implement any changes.

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