

## **Information from Birmingham City Council:**

### **Fire Incident on London Tower Block**

#### **Background**

In light of the tragic incident in London, I have prepared the following information which can be disseminated to all elected members and shared as our response to concerned residents and tenants in the City.

#### **The incident in London**

The fire was reported at the 24-storey block, Grenfell Tower, in north Kensington, 00:54. Grenfell Tower is on Latimer Road, in west London. Grenfell Tower is reported to contain 120 flats

It is believed to have started on the fourth floor and spread incredibly quickly.

It is not yet known what caused the fire.

Grenfell Tower was built in 1974 by Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council.

A two-year £10m refurbishment - which was part of a wider transformation of the estate - was completed by Rydon Construction last year. Work included new exterior cladding, replacement windows and a communal heating system. The exterior cladding work included ACM rainscreen overclad, replacement windows curtain walling, louvres and feature metalwork

The tower is managed by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) on behalf of the council.

The local Grenfell Action Group had claimed, before and during the refurbishment, the block constituted a fire risk and residents had warned that access to the site for emergency vehicles was "severely restricted".

In February 2013 residents warned fire safety equipment, including fire extinguishers, had not been tested for 12 months.

The tower block was given a medium fire risk rating - defined as a normal fire risk - in 2016 following completion of the refurbishment by the London Fire Brigade and Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council.

The council insists the block has been regularly inspected.

## Tower Blocks in Birmingham

Resident Re-assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff working with WMFS Fire Safety Officers will be going to the blocks to provide some re-assurance to residents, checking communal areas etc at the same time</li> <li>- Residents contacting the service will be provided with reassurance messages via the contact centre and by housing staff</li> <li>- Local staff are being briefed</li> </ul>
Fire Safety Checks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We have our own "in house" team of officers who are accredited fire risk assessors and administer our fire prevention programmes. All have received formal Fire Risk Assessment training and the required refresher training from West Midlands Fire Service designated training department and through the British Safety Council.</li> <li>- Since 2005 and the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order, Landlord's became responsible for managing fire risk assessments where communal areas exist.</li> <li>- To comply with this we undertake annual inspections city wide on approximately:-             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;200 Tower Blocks</li> <li>&gt;1800 Low Rise Blocks</li> <li>&gt;500 Properties that have communal areas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- All our blocks have a current fire risk assessment</li> <li>- All are inspected on a rolling 12 month basis for a full fire risk assessment</li> </ul>
Ongoing remedial works following checks	<p>Any subsequent remedial works identified through inspection are carried out within the appropriate time scales. As part of our programme of fire stopping works we provide the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Half hour fire stop communal doors and screens.</li> <li>- Fire stopping to ducts and cupboards on communal landings.</li> <li>- Improved fire safety signage.</li> <li>- Self closing refuse chute hoppers.</li> <li>- Class O fire retardant decorative coatings to communal areas</li> <li>- Sprinklers installed to bin rooms.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All flats that have given us access have had wired/battery operated smoke alarms.</li> <li>- Individual flats have half hour fire stop entrance doors.</li> <li>- Fire stopping to risers.</li> <li>- Installation of emergency lighting/standby battery systems.</li> <li>- Tower blocks have had a secure keysafe box installed which includes drop key and fob for access for the emergency services.</li> </ul> <p>We have a programme of on-going maintenance, renewal and upgrading of communal emergency lighting.</p> <p>We do review the specification of the materials that we use and for approximately the last 5 years we have insisted that all trunking in communal areas is metal rather than plastic, with appropriate mounting and support that comply with current building regulations.</p> <p>We have a working relationship with West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS); we share our stock data with them and target properties where we encounter repeat incidents.</p> <p>We undertake joint incident investigations with WMFS where technical improvements to a buildings fabric could minimise the risk of repeat occurrences.</p> <p>We are aware that local fire fighting teams are carrying out familiarisation audits of high rise blocks within their catchment areas which should help them tackle any incidents that occur in future.</p> <p>We also attend a quarterly meeting with West Midlands Fire Service, West Midlands Police and other surrounding social housing providers in a bench marking group in relation to Fire Safety Management, we share our learning and target various initiatives as and when required.</p>
Preventative measures	<p>Daily inspections of all high rise blocks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lift/Lift Doors</li> <li>- Roof Area and Access</li> <li>- Tank Room/ Lift Motor Room</li> <li>- Landings/No Smoking/Fire signs Store cupboards</li> <li>- Dry Risers visually – checked Fire hoses (where applicable)</li> <li>- Doors/Door Closers/Fire Door &amp; Partitions</li> <li>- Chute Area/ Room/Hoppers</li> <li>- Window Catches/Glazing</li> <li>- Stairs/ Stair Rails</li> </ul>

- Lights/Light Shades
- Communal front & rear entrance doors
- External Area
- Store sheds
- Bin Room including guillotine
- Time of inspection
- HAV equipment not used signature required
- Information displayed cupboards
- Regular fire risk assessment
- Weekly caretaker block inspections
- Testing of dry and wet risers
- Emergency lighting/stand by battery systems are inspected quarterly
- Testing of sprinklers to bin rooms quarterly
- We have regular meetings and liaise with West Midlands Fire Service and other midlands social housing providers and share good practice.
- Robust test and inspect electrical wiring programme.
- All emergencies are reported immediately and escalated to the supervisor if required.

#### Night inspections

- These are carried out to blocks across the city which are linked to the security service to identify any Health and Safety risks including the removal of any hazards, checking the dry/wet risers and the removal of any rubbish that can create a fire hazard.

We also have a monthly high rise audit report completed which looks at the following aspects.

#### External

- Litter
- Bulky rubbish
- Graffiti
- Door entry system
- Bin room
- General appearance

#### Internal

- Communal entrance
- Lifts
- Stairs
- Landing
- Internal glazing
- Internal graffiti
- Chute rooms
- Health and Safety/ No Smoking Signs
- Completion of HOUS1176

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Daily block inspection sheets</li> </ul> <p>Compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All daily block inspections are signed off by the Housing Officer and counter-signed by the Street Scene Coordinator</li> <li>- Street Scene coordinators and local estate based teams have monthly tasking meetings to review trends and escalate concerns.</li> <li>- Each member of staff is trained on the procedures in conjunction with corporate Health and Safety.</li> <li>- Fire risers are also checked by West Midlands Fire Service as part of their measures.</li> <li>- All high rise bin stores have sprinkler systems.</li> <li>- Rubbish removal is also actioned.</li> <li>- Tenants are provided with a set of service standards outlining BCCs responsibility and the tenants responsibilities. Any breach of these responsibilities by the tenant will result in the necessary action as part of the enforcement of the Tenancy Conditions.</li> </ul>
Construction	<p>The current capital investment programme includes external wall insulation which is different to the over cladding with ACM cassette rain screen and curtain walling that appears to have been used on Grenfell Tower.</p> <p>The City has used insulated render systems to externally clad/insulate BCC tower blocks. The products that have been used are Structherm, Weber, Alumasc and all are class O or “low risk” as described in the national building regulations. They have also attained BS8414 part 1 (fire performance of external cladding systems). It has been used on the following blocks. Ashford Tower, Chamberlain Gardens blocks, Cock Hill, Four Towers TMO, Cranleigh and Repton, New Zealand Blocks, Poets Blocks, Cricket Blocks, Lyndhurst, Barrow House, Turves Green Blocks, Civic Close. Manton and Reynolds, Bakeman House.</p> <p>Below is the definition of BS 8414.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The BS 8414 test methods provide a robust methodology for determining the fire performance characteristics of external cladding systems. The standard is divided into two parts:</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Part 1 provides a test method for assessing the fire performance of non-loadbearing external cladding systems applied to the face of the building. This can also be used to test rainscreen overcladding and external wall insulation systems.</li> <li>- Part 2 provides a test method for assessing the fire performance of non-loadbearing external cladding systems fixed to and supported by a structural steel frame.</li> <li>- These test methods were developed by BRE, based on over thirty years of knowledge and extensive research programmes carried out in this field, and were developed to address the challenges of testing and classifying the evolving designs and materials being brought to the market. The test methods were first published as British Standards in 2002 and are carried out in specialist laboratories, such as the Burn Hall at BRE in Watford, where they are performed on external wall systems at full-scale incorporating joints and corner details together with fixings, insulation, fire breaks, cavities and all other elements of the system construction as appropriate. The standard evaluates whether a cladding system – when subjected to a simulated fire in a compartment, breaking out of an opening (such as a window) in an external wall – will result in excessive fire spread up the outside of the building and its potential to re-enter at a higher level</li> <li>- We comply fully with manufacturer’s installation instructions which have been passed by the British Board of Agrément (industry standard). Some systems include a horizontal fire break.</li> </ul> <p>Birmingham City Council has taken the above approach following the change in legislative requirements and reported recommendations as a result of previous fire safety incidents such as Lakanal Tower and Shirley Towers.</p>
Access to tower blocks	Access to tower blocks is via door entry system and we have worked with emergency services to ensure that access can be gained via aces to emergency keys on site
Key Messages for Media from Cabinet Member	<p>We want to reassure tenants that we have a range of safety measures in place at tower block</p> <p>Where refurbishment works have been carried out we have used fire resistant materials</p> <p>We have our own "in house" team of officers who are accredited fire risk assessors and administer our fire prevention programmes</p>

	<p>All our blocks have a current fire risk assessment</p> <p>We inspect our blocks on a daily basis and any fire risks are identified and dealt with as a priority</p> <p>We liaise closely with West Midland Fire service</p> <p>We have a programme of fire stopping works</p>
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### **Updated Briefing Note on the London Fire**

Further to the briefing sent out on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 I am now providing an update in order to respond to a number of points of clarification and additional queries. The additional queries essentially relate to construction and refurbishment of our Tower Blocks and our liaison with the Fire Service on Fire safety Checks

#### **Construction and refurbishment works**

I would reiterate that the current Capital Investment Programme does include external wall installation which is different to the over cladding with ACM cassette rain screen and curtain walling that appears to have been used on Grenfell Tower.

Instead the City has used render systems to externally/insulate BCC tower blocks. We have only used products that have attained BSA414 standard.

Any structural work carried out to Birmingham's Tower Block is carried out solely by Birmingham City Council.

I would also point out where concerns over the design in specific tower blocks have been raised we will investigate and review those concerns where they relate to singular stair cases and means of escape.

#### **Fire Safety Checks**

In addition to our own in-house team of officers who are accredited fire risk assessors and who administer our fire prevention programmes, the Fire Service also carry out inspections. Any issues of concern identified result in an enforcement order been issued.

At this stage we don't know what has caused the fire in London. We don't know where it started and we don't know why it spread in the way it did

Next steps will be to take stock and review our procedure in light of this incident and take forward any recommendations arising from the subsequent report or changes in legislation.