

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

to  
**Cabinet**

on

**19<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

Report prepared by: Andrew Lewis, Deputy Chief Executive  
(Place)

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## Fire Safety Measures following the Grenfell Tower Tragedy

**Place Scrutiny Committee**  
**Executive Councillor: Councillor Flewitt**  
**Part 1**

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To advise Members of the action the Council has taken following the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. **That Members note the action taken to date.**
- 2.2. **To note that a further report will be submitted to Cabinet detailing the outcomes of the first phase of the Fire Safety review being undertaken by the Council, South Essex Homes and Essex Fire & Rescue Service**
- 2.3. **Agree that there is consideration in the Capital Budget proposals for 2018/19 to fund any necessary remedial work or fire safety improvements that are identified by the review in recommendation 2.2 above.**

### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The Grenfell Tower fire tragedy occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017: Grenfell Tower is a twenty four storey block of public sector flats in the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.
- 3.2. The fire, which is under investigation and the subject of a Public Inquiry, is known to have caused at least eighty deaths. An independent review of Building Regulations and fire safety measures has also been established.
- 3.3. The rapid acceleration in the spread of the fire and its intensity is thought to have been caused by the building's external cladding which was constructed from Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) which is commonly used to clad the exterior of buildings.

- 3.4. In the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy the Leader of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council said that the Council would be reviewing fire safety measures across its estate – in order to progress this the Acting Chief Executive established an internal working group, including senior representation from South Essex Homes (SEH), to oversee and co-ordinate this work.
- 3.5. At the meeting of the Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> June the Council stood for a one minute silence as a mark of respect for all those affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy as well as the recent terror attacks in Manchester and London.
- 3.6. At their meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June, Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resources outlining the capital programme outturn for 2016/17. On consideration of the report and in light of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Leader of the Council proposed the re-profiling of £2M from the 2018/19 HRA Future Programme into the current 2017/18 financial year. This would enable the existing on-going programme of fire installation works to the Council's tower blocks to be accelerated and completed earlier than planned and within this financial year.

#### **4. Discussion & Proposals**

- 4.1 Members and particularly residents will be reassured to know that none of the Council's tower blocks have external cladding fitted.
- 4.2 In addition to this every Council owned high rise block and sheltered housing scheme across the borough has an annual fire risk assessment carried out by a qualified assessor. Essex Fire and Rescue Service (EFRS) also carry out their own annual audits and the results are recorded.
- 4.3 Actions recommended as a result of these assessments are carried out by South Essex Homes as a matter of urgency. This comprehensive approach ensures buildings remain compliant with the most up to date regulatory and legislative requirements and also good practice as advised by EFRS.
- 4.4 SEH's compliance officer carries out interim visits to inspect the blocks during the year in order to ensure compliance is maintained. Caretaking and estate staff attend all high rise blocks seven days a week and part of that attendance is to ensure all lifts, stairs and communal areas are clean and clear of any dumped objects or materials. Any dumped item is removed as promptly as possible so as to avoid any risk of fire in communal areas.
- 4.5 With regard to specific fire safety installations in high rise blocks SEH have been carrying out a programme of replacing all front entrance doors and frames, along with all communal doors and panels, with the highest specification products available on the market. These have proved to be completely effective in preventing the transmission of smoke and fire where fire has occurred. They enable the fire service recommended policy, for tenants to remain in their home in the event of a fire outside, to be fully effective in protecting residents.
- 4.6 Of the 13 high rise blocks in Southend, 10 have had these works completed, one block is currently in the process of having this work carried out and the remaining two blocks are planned to have the work carried out in this financial

year following Cabinet's approval on 20<sup>th</sup> June to bring forward £2m of capital funding as set out earlier in this report.

- 4.7 In addition each high rise block has a sprinkler system installed in the ground floor refuse chamber, as these are areas where low level fires have occurred in the past, and which have proved to be very effective.
- 4.8 Every Council tenanted property also has an individual hard wired smoke detector which is checked and serviced on an annual basis and SEH are currently in the process of installing individual reminder signs to the back of each tenanted property's entrance door to further remind residents of fire safety action in the event of a fire.
- 4.9 At national level the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) wrote to all Local Authorities to establish the numbers of high rise / tall buildings in their management that had ACM cladding attached to them. They also provided Local Authorities with access to the Building Research Establishment at Garston in Hertfordshire where they were able to send samples of cladding that could be tested for combustibility – the Council has not needed to use this facility.
- 4.10 The Council has responded fully to all information requests from Government and no issues have been raised by Government as a result of the Council's returns.
- 4.11 As a result of the Grenfell Tower fire the Council has initiated a number of actions which are set out below:
- Assessments have been undertaken by SEH on all their residential tower blocks.
  - Fire safety measures are being reviewed across the Council's property estate – this includes all properties managed by SEH, as well as the Civic Centre, leisure and cultural buildings and schools.
  - The Council has been in direct contact with other public sector partners (including the NHS, the University of Essex and South Essex College) who have high rise / tall buildings in their stock to request that they reassure themselves about fire safety measures and external cladding. No safety issues have arisen from this that the Council is aware of.
  - The Council has written to Housing Associations with high rise / tall buildings in the borough to reassure themselves that there are no external cladding issues that would be a cause for concern and that they are reviewing fire safety measures in place in light of the Grenfell Tower fire.
  - The Council has contacted all schools to provide support and assistance should they require it. The Department for Education has written to schools in respect of risk assessment policies – the Council is assisting the schools it

is directly responsible to support them reviewing their own fire safety arrangements.

- In addition to this the Council has researched its planning and building control records to establish a list of high rise / tall buildings that have external cladding attached to them. This list has been shared with the Fire Service and cross referenced with the records that they hold – a total of forty eight buildings have been identified as a result 12 of these are clad. The Council has written to DCLG to seek their advice to establish Government's expectations of Local Authorities liaising with private sector property owners. As a result of this dialogue with DCLG the Council is in the process of writing to all private sector property owners identified by its review to encourage them to reassure themselves that they have appropriate fire safety measure in place – this relates to both external cladding and internal measures and procedures to manage fire safety matters.
- A Tri – partite Fire Safety review has been commissioned by the Council, SEH and EFRS. It is proposed that this will review the current fire safety practices, procedures and policies in place in relation to the Council's property portfolio including the housing stock and make recommendations for updates in the light of the emerging lessons from the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the independent review of Building Regulations and Public Inquiry referred to earlier in this report. The outcome of this review will be reported back to Cabinet in due course. The review will also consider the Council's own emergency response plans and its ability to manage an incident of this magnitude in the future.

## **5. Other Options**

- 5.1 Realistically there are no practical alternatives to the measures the Council has put in place following the Grenfell Tower fire – in situations such as these it is important for the Council to take on and exercise its community leadership role and do its best to ensure that appropriate fire safety measures are in place for all buildings in the borough and reassure residents that their safety is of paramount importance.

## **6. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 6.1 To reassure Members that the Council has reviewed fire safety management measures across its own property portfolio as well as discharge its community leadership role and seek assurance from other public and private sector building owners that they are also reviewing safety measures. It is also important that the Council puts in place appropriate levels of capital funding to ensure that any necessary improvement measures that result from the review can be addressed.

## **7. Corporate implications**

### **7.1 Contribution to Council's vision & corporate priorities**

### **7.2 Financial implications**

Once the results of the fire safety review are known then it will be clearer on the level of capital funding required to carry out the resultant action plan.

As part of the budget setting process for 2018/19 Members will need to consider the level of funding required as part of any capital budget proposal. If there is a need for any urgent action prior to the next financial year this will need to be met from existing Health & Safety budgets and if necessary the Council's contingency and/or reserves depending on the amount required.

### **7.3 Legal implications**

There are legal responsibilities on building owners to ensure that their buildings comply with fire safety legislation, building regulations and health and safety legislation. It is also highly likely that additional legislative responsibilities will result from the Public Inquiry and from the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety

### **7.4 People implications**

The most important implication is to provide reassurance to people who live, or indeed work, in high rise / tall buildings across the borough that fire safety measures in those buildings are appropriate.

### **7.5 Property implications**

The review will consider fire safety measures across the Council's property portfolio – as a result there are likely to be improvement measures that will need to be undertaken and which will be subject to a future report to Cabinet.

### **7.6 Consultation**

The measures set out in this report have not been subject to consultation but the Council has liaised closely with Essex Fire & Rescue Service, other public sector partners and is writing to private sector building owners in respect of external cladding materials and fire safety measures.

### **7.7 Equality & Diversity implications**

There are equality and diversity implications particularly in relation to fire safety measures in tower blocks and these will be fully considered as part of the tri partite review of the Council's property portfolio – it includes things like fire evacuation procedures for people with mobility difficulties, warning measures for people with visual and / or hearing impairments, and the location and storage of mobility scooters for example.

### **7.8 Risk Assessment**

The measures set out in this report are designed to ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place and that they are subject to review as a result of the Grenfell Road fire.

## 7.9 **Value for Money**

It is important that all fire safety measures are carried out in the best interest of residents, Council staff and the public and that any works undertaken will be through the appropriate procurement process to ensure value for money. In addition, it will be important for any necessary works to be undertaken for insurance purposes to ensure that the Council is protected financially.

## 7.10 **Community Safety implications**

The measures set out in this report are entirely consistent with the Council's community safety responsibilities and priorities.

## 7.11 **Environmental implications**

There are no additional environmental implications as a result of this report.

## 8. **Background Papers**

8.1 None

## 9. **Appendices**

9.1 None