

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

GRENFELL TOWER FIRE – LOCAL RESPONSE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on action taken locally following the Grenfell Tower fire.
- 1.2 Following the Grenfell Tower fire the council has taken positive action to identify and mitigate any risks affecting its buildings. Further action is planned. There are no significant concerns identified in respect of the council's buildings at this stage
- 1.3 Ongo Homes are responsible for four residential tower blocks located in North Lincolnshire. They have also taken positive action in response to the Grenfell Tower fire.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Grenfell Tower fire occurred on 14 June 2017. The building in question is a 24-storey tower block located in North Kensington, West London. Construction of the 67-metre high building was completed in 1974. It comprised of 129 flats at the time of the fire. A major refurbishment of the building was completed in 2016. The works included the installation of new windows, heating upgrades and new rain-screen cladding made of aluminium composite material (ACM), in part aimed at improving the external appearance of the building.
- 2.2 The fire resulted in a significant number of fatalities (at least 80 at the time of drafting this report) as well as many non-fatal casualties. The Prime Minister has ordered a full public inquiry into the fire.
- 2.3 The exact cause of the fire is still subject to an ongoing investigation and it may be some time before a full understanding of how the fire started or why it took hold in the way it did is reached. However, there are reported indications that the fire started in a faulty fridge-freezer in a fourth floor flat. It is further suggested that the ACM cladding potentially contributed to the rapid spread of the fire, although this is still subject to ongoing investigation and confirmation. Fire safety arrangements in the building have also come under some criticism.

2.4 There are four residential tower blocks located in North Lincolnshire. These are all located in Scunthorpe, as follows:

- Trent View House – 13 floors with 79 individual flats
- Crosby House – 19 floors with 76 individual flats
- Princess House – 19 floors with 76 individual flats
- Sutton House – 19 floors with 76 individual flats

Ongo Homes own and operate each of the facilities in question. All of these buildings have been the subject of refurbishment works since their original construction that included the installation of external cladding, although crucially not made of ACM.

2.5 In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, Government departments and agencies have issued some guidance and requests for information from local authorities and social housing providers. These place significance on the following matters:

- The presence of ACM cladding panels.
- The importance of Fire Risk Assessments that specifically take account of a building's cladding.
- Elevated risk associated with buildings above 18 metres or four to six storeys in height.
- Elevated risk associated with buildings that have a residential use.

2.6 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) wrote to all Local Authorities and Housing Associations on 18 June 2017. They asked for the undertaking of checks to determine the presence of all ACM panels installed on buildings over 18 metres high used for social housing. Local Authorities and Housing Associations were asked to report all findings to the DCLG. As the council is not a provider of social housing this is not relevant. As such, we submitted a nil return.

2.7 Ongo Homes have submitted information requested by DCLG relating to the four residential tower blocks located in North Lincolnshire. Our Building Control team provided information and technical support to assist them in preparing their response. As a result, DCLG did not ask them to provide any supplementary information, as was the case with 600 other buildings across the country. This included samples of external wall cladding for urgent testing by the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

2.8 The Governance and Standards Scrutiny Panel invited representatives of Ongo Homes and the Humberside Fire and Rescue Service to attend their meeting on Thursday 29 June 2017, to discuss the issues as they affect high-rise tower blocks in North Lincolnshire. The council was one of the first in the country to convene a scrutiny panel to discuss the various issues arising from the Grenfell Tower fire. Some of the key points discussed included the following:

- construction materials used in Ongo's 4 tower blocks, including the use of 'cladding'
- details of alarm systems installed in the buildings
- advice available to residents should an emergency be declared
- maintenance and inspection schedules at the 4 tower blocks
- resident engagement since the Grenfell Tower fire
- feasibility of installing a sprinkler system in each building
- arrangements for the testing of cladding
- cladding on other local buildings such as hospitals, colleges etc
- cladding on other Ongo properties
- review of emergency procedures
- extent of partnership working to inform and educate local residents
- building regulations
- the public enquiry

2.9 Ongo Homes confirmed at the Scrutiny Panel their intention to install sprinkler systems in all of their tower blocks. They indicated that their aim is to progress the work required within six to eight months, although they stress that this depends upon the time required to complete the necessary design and procurement work.

2.10 The risks to life and property associated with the various factors associated with the Grenfell Tower fire are clear. In response, council officers have taken immediate action to review the council's entire operational building stock, including schools, operational and commercial property. Completion of a desktop review has concluded that there are unlikely to be any buildings within our estate that are either over 18 metres/four-six storeys high and/or clad with ACM panels. On-site inspections to support the desktop review are ongoing at a limited number of specific sites.

2.10 On 23 June 2017, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) wrote to the council requesting information on schools, excluding Voluntary-Aided schools and Academies. This is part of an immediate data collection exercise to update their intelligence on certain types of school building. These include those which are four storeys or more high and/or which provide residential accommodation. The ESFA specifically requested information relating to fire risk assessments, fire alarm tests and drills, the residential use of buildings on school sites and the presence of buildings that are four storeys high or more.

2.11 The council submitted a response to the ESFA's request by the required deadline of Friday 30 June 2017. The information submitted constituted a 'nil return' as none of the school buildings in question are used for providing residential accommodation or are four storeys or more in height.

2.12 Further action is also in hand that includes completion of the following steps as quickly as possible:

- On-site inspections of all buildings with cladding panels to confirm the findings of the desktop review.
- A review of all Fire Risk Assessments to ensure that one is in place for every council building, that it is current (taking account of the building's cladding) and there are no unresolved fire safety issues.
- A reminder to all council staff, in particular service and building managers, about the importance of good fire safety practice including guidance on how to raise any concerns that might arise.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the information set out in this report and support the positive action taken locally by both the council and Ongo Homes following the Grenfell Tower fire.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Following the tragic events at the Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, both the council and Ongo Homes have taken positive action to respond to requests for information from Government departments and agencies. Ongo Homes have taken steps to reassure their tenants and have announced plans to invest in additional fire prevention works in their four residential tower blocks, including the retrospective installation of fire sprinkler systems.

- 4.2 The action taken by the council will ensure that our approach to managing fire risks in our operational buildings remain robust and relevant in the light of the emerging issues arising from the Grenfell Tower fire. As such, both our customers and employees can be confident that risks continue to be effectively managed and our procedures for responding to a fire incident continue to remain fit for purpose.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 Not applicable at this stage.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

- 6.1 Not applicable at this stage.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

- 7.1 Specialist officers from across the council contributed towards developing the council response to the Grenfell Tower fire.
- 7.2 The Senior Leadership Team of Executive Directors and Directors support the approach adopted by the council.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That Cabinet notes the information set out in this report and supports the positive action taken locally by both the council and Ongo Homes following the Grenfell Tower fire.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None