



Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Housing Decision meeting
Date of meeting:	10 October 2017
Subject:	Fire Safety for Local Authority Housing blocks of flats
Report by:	James Hill - Interim Director Property & Housing
Wards affected:	All
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	No

1. Requested by

A report on Fire Safety at Local Authority Housing Blocks of Flats was requested by the Cabinet Member for Housing.

2. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Cabinet Member for Housing regarding the fire safety work that has been undertaken at Local Authority Housing blocks of flats and to highlight the future decisions that will be required regarding fire safety work.

3. Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Housing:

3.1 notes the work being undertaken across the Local Authority Housing blocks

4. Background - Grenfell Tower Fire

4.1 Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, the government established a Building Safety Programme with the aim of ensuring high rise residential buildings are safe, and residents feel safe in them.

4.2 Screening tests at the Building Research Establishment (BRE) were identifying whether Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding samples from buildings met the limited combustibility requirements of current Building Regulations guidance.

- 4.3 An Independent Expert Advisory Panel, appointed on 27 June 2017, provided the government with advice on immediate steps that can be put in place to make buildings, and the people living in them, as safe as possible. The panel have a wealth of experience in fire and building safety, and have drawn on wider technical expertise to inform their advice to government, including from experts on building design and construction, building control, testing processes, fire safety and fire engineering.
- 4.4 Seven further large scale tests have been undertaken to understand whether and when it may be safe to use ACM as part of an external wall cladding system in high rise buildings, in line with current Building Regulations guidance.

5. Horatia House and Leamington House Cladding

ACM Cladding Tests

- 5.1 The only Council owned Housing high rise blocks of flats identified with ACM cladding are Horatia House and Leamington House. Both blocks are Bison construction and were built in 1965. Each block is 18 storeys high and consists of a total of 136 No. flats (one, two and three bedroom properties) within each block, there are 8 No. flats per storey, there are no flats on the ground floor and there are two escape stairwells per block.
- 5.2 Each block is fully clad on two elevations and partially clad on the remaining elevations. Horatia House is clad using ACM (Reynobond product) and Leamington House is clad using ACM (Alucabond product). The type of insulation used behind the ACM cladding in both instances is a stone mineral wool product (Rockwool) which is a non combustible material. The project to install cladding at Leamington House was undertaken by Conought in 2002, whilst the project to install cladding was undertaken by McGinley in 2004.
- 5.3 In accordance with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance, samples of ACM cladding were sent for testing at the BRE on 21 June 2017. The Council was notified of the results of the initial screening test on 22 June 2017 that confirmed that the (filler used in the) ACM cladding to both blocks was ACM category 3.
- 5.4 A subsequent series of large scale system tests to the British Standard test (BS8414) was undertaken as a way of demonstrating that a wall system meets Building Regulations guidance for buildings over 18m. The result of this subsequent system test was confirmed on 2 August 2017.
- 5.5 The Expert Panel's advice following these tests is that ACM on Horatia House and Leamington House with an unmodified polyethylene filler (category 3 in screening tests) with any type of insulation presents a significant hazard on buildings over 18m.

- 5.6 A joint fire safety inspection was undertaken on 22 June 2017 by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Council that concluded that the existing fire safety measures within both blocks of flats were sufficient for residents to remain in occupation. In addition to the existing fire safety measures the Council immediately organised a 24/7 fire watch that will remain in place until the cladding is removed from both blocks of flats.
- 5.7 Further surveys to all the communal areas and individual properties have been undertaken to inspect the fire safety measures that exist in each block of flats, generally the fire safety measures within the blocks of flats are sufficient and no serious or fundamental issues have been identified. Repairs or a planned project will be undertaken to rectify any issues identified as appropriate.

Phase One Cladding Removal

- 5.8 Work commenced on 23 June 2017 to remove all cladding to both blocks and is currently in progress on site. Removal of the cladding is complex with soil investigations and structural surveys required to determine safe high level access systems for each block of flats.
- 5.9 The work to remove the cladding is being undertaken by Mountjoy Ltd, in accordance with the contract that already exists for the repairs and maintenance of housing properties. It is anticipated that complete removal of the existing cladding to both blocks of flats will be completed by February 2018. The estimated cost related to the removal of the cladding and initial fire safety measures is £1.5m. An emergency budget code has been set up to record the costs.

Phase Two Cladding Replacement Feasibility Report

- 5.10 It is important to remember that these blocks were clad with the outer cladding panel and insulation to improve the weather proofing and thermal properties of the block and it would be inappropriate to leave the original façade exposed, therefore re-cladding of both blocks will be undertaken as part of phase two; a feasibility evaluating all options is being prepared by external consultants, ECD Architects, who have extensive experience of cladding tower blocks and are currently working with the Council on other similar projects. The BRE have also been appointed to work with structural engineers as part of the feasibility, structural surveys will be undertaken to inform the feasibility options for both blocks.
- 5.11 A contract will be procured in accordance with the Council procurement rules once the extent of the cladding work required has been confirmed and we have a better understanding of the appropriate options available, in the light of the tests that have been conducted.
- 5.12 Initial estimates have indicated that the total cost of removing the cladding (phase one) is £1.5m and recladding (phase two) is £9.4m. The total estimated project cost to undertake both phases are estimated could cost £10.9M.

Cladding review

- 5.13 A review is being undertaken by ECD Architects to evaluate the circumstances of how the cladding at each block was installed, the specification requirements, responsibility for design, compliance with relevant regulations at the time of the refurbishment and actual details of the installation as part of the scheme.

Resident Communication

- 5.14 Residents are regularly updated by letter reassuring them regarding the safety of the block, advising them of fire safety actions they can undertake and keeping them updated regarding the project to remove the cladding. Dates of letters issued to residents are;
- a) 16 June 2017 - Letter fire advice for residents informing residents to all high rise blocks
 - b) 23 June 2017 - Letter informing residents of action to remove cladding after ACM screening test
 - c) 24 June 2017 - Letter informing residents of adjacent blocks of action to remove cladding after ACM screening test
 - d) 28 June 2017 - Letter after public meeting and frequently asked questions
 - e) 30 June 2017 - Letter confirming extended office opening hours and contact details
 - f) 7 July 2017 - Letter update regarding progress to remove cladding
 - g) 10 July 2017 - Letter update regarding progress to remove cladding, fire advice and frequently asked questions
 - h) 13 July 2017 - Poster regarding fire safety contact details including translation
 - i) 18 July 2017 - Letter Horatia House car parking
 - j) 19 July 2017 - Letter update regarding progress to remove cladding
 - k) 3 August 2017 - Letter update regarding progress to remove cladding
 - l) 3 August 2017 - Letter offering residents electrical safety check
 - m) 18 August 2017 - Letter update regarding progress to remove cladding
 - n) 8 Sept 2017 - Leaflet promoting RLO drop in sessions twice a week
 - o) 12 Sept 2017 - Letter update regarding progress to remove cladding, advice regarding RLO
- 5.15 All information that has been provided to residents has also available to residents translated to Arabic, Bengali, Kurdish and Polish.
- 5.16 A public meeting was held on 27 June 2017 with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and local politicians to which the residents of both blocks were invited to attend.

- 5.17 The Council and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service undertook a joint community event for all Somerstown high rise blocks, including Horatia and Leamington House, providing fire safety advice to residents. Further events to other high rise blocks are being planned.
- 5.18 Residents of both blocks have been provided with a specific phone number 'in hours' to contact the Council regarding the works being undertaken and discuss any concerns. Opening hours of the Somerstown Area Housing Office were also extended to cover weekends to enable residents the opportunity to discuss any issues.
- 5.19 A Council Resident Liaison Officer has also been allocated to both blocks that are available twice a week at the community room within each block to discuss any resident issues and will feedback any concerns.

Fire Safety Electrical Checks

- 5.20 It is believed that the Grenfell fire started with an electrical fault associated with 'white goods' within one of the flats. As an additional fire safety precaution, the Council is offering all residents in Horatia House and Leamington House the option to have an electrical safety check on any 'white goods' that they may have in their home.
- 5.21 The electrical safety check is being carried out at no charge to residents by our service provider, Liberty Group Ltd, who has extensive experience of this type of work. The electrical safety check will ensure that leads are not damaged, plugs are wired correctly and appliances are earthed and safe to use. The electrical safety check will NOT determine how long the appliance will continue to work or what repairs may be required in the future.
- 5.22 When carrying out the check a leaflet will be provided with simple advice for residents to undertake a visual check of their other electrical appliances.

Leaseholders

- 5.23 There are no leaseholders within Horatia House but there is one leaseholder at Leamington House who purchased their property in 2004, after the original scheme to clad the block of flats was undertaken in 2002. They therefore did not contribute to the cost of the original cladding scheme.
- 5.24 The lease sets out that any reasonable cost of the works proposed can be recharged to the leaseholder with the costs recovered from leaseholder reserve funds. There is flexibility for leaseholders to either pay a one off charge or adjust payments into their reserve fund to achieve a target maintenance plan over 30 years. If the option of using the reserve fund is chosen then there will need to be an increase in contributions as a result of the works being carried out. The Council will be flexible and reasonable when agreeing any repayment plan as appropriate with the leaseholder.

6. Fire Safety Inspections

High Rise Joint Inspections

- 6.1 The Council has forty high rise (six storeys and above) blocks of flats, of which twenty seven are six to nine storeys high. The remaining thirteen blocks of flats are ten storeys and above and defined as tower blocks.
- 6.2 A joint fire safety inspection has been undertaken by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Council to review the existing fire safety measures within all the Local Authority Housing high rise blocks of flats. All joint inspections were completed by 27 July 2017 and the inspections confirmed that fire safety measures were sufficient for residents to remain in occupation.
- 6.3 Actions resulting from the fire safety inspections have been allocated to Council teams as appropriate; regular meetings with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service are being undertaken to review progress of the actions.

Fire Risk Assessments

- 6.4 The Council has a total of 1096 Local Authority Housing blocks of flats, including the forty high rise blocks of flats. Fire Risk Assessments for all blocks of flats in accordance with The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 are up to date as appropriate and there are none outstanding that currently require a review.

7. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

- 7.1 The Council has been regularly updating the DCLG throughout, providing stock information about the Council Local Authority Housing blocks of flats and regular updates about progress to remove the ACM cladding. The DCLG have issued advice to Landlords and provided consolidated information.
- 7.2 The government plans to provide further advice on the issues building owners may need to consider as they undertake remedial work, and will work with building owners to ensure buildings are made safe.
- 7.3 The government is working with the Expert Panel to consider whether there are any heightened risks linked to other cladding systems and broader fire and building safety issues in high rise buildings. The government propose to align the briefing notes with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work (a guide which sets out the different stages of a construction project). Examples of the briefing notes expected to be published include: advice on feasibility issues and options appraisal, including a summary of cladding systems available and issues to be considered when replacing part or all of the cladding system; and information on procurement approaches and available frameworks.
- 7.4 The government has established an Independent Review of building regulations and fire safety, led by Dame Judith Hackitt, which will aim to ensure that buildings are safe in future. The review will publish an interim report at the end of November and a final report in the spring of 2018.

- 7.5 The government has established a public inquiry to examine the circumstances surrounding the fire at Grenfell Tower, led by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, whose terms of reference include the cause of the fire and the adequacy of building and fire regulations which will allow the inquiry to get to the truth of what happened and learn the lessons to stop a similar catastrophe happening in the future.

8. Funding Fire Safety Works

- 8.1 The government expectation is that building owners will fund measures designed to make their buildings fire safe and maintain them as such, drawing on their existing resources to do so. Where a Local Authority has concerns about funding essential fire safety measures, they are advised to approach the DCLG as soon as possible to discuss the position. In these cases, the Government will consider removing financial restrictions, where financial barriers stand in the way of essential works being done.
- 8.2 This Council wrote to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 15 August 2017 to request urgent consideration to allocating funding to Portsmouth City Council to enable essential fire safety measures to be undertaken as soon as practicable. Further information to support the request for financial support was provided to the DCLG on 15 September 2017 and discussions are ongoing.

9. Next Steps

- 9.1 A fire safety group has been established by Council Officers to not only discuss the blocks of flats with ACM cladding, but to discuss and coordinate wider fire safety issues to all blocks of flats including fire policy, sprinklers, fire risk assessments and any other fire related issues, including in the private sector.
- 9.2 The Council will continue to regularly meet representatives of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to continue the excellent working relationship and share information regarding the Council Housing blocks of flats, progress of fire safety plans and seek advice.
- 9.3 The Council is taking the opportunity to review all its fire safety related policies and when completed a report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Housing recommending any proposed changes to existing policies as appropriate
- 9.4 When the feasibility report regarding options for recladding both blocks has been completed a report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Housing recommending the proposed work to be undertaken to both Horatia House and Leamington House as appropriate including how the work will be funded.

Signed by:

James Hill, Interim Director of Property and Housing.

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/
rejected by on

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Signed by:
Councillor Jennie Brent
Cabinet Member for Housing

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
N/A	