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Title of meeting:	Cabinet member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness
Subject:	Fire Safety Improvement Programme
Date of meeting:	8 th March 2021
Report by:	James Hill - Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services
Report Author:	Steve Groves - Head of Building Maintenance
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness**2. Purpose**

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness has requested a summary of the fire safety improvement programme and investment that is planned for Council owned HRA block of flats.
- 2.2 The report provides an update on work already agreed and new work planned. The report notes the impact of the pandemic on the progress of the programme and sets out the plan to take the work forward.
- 2.3 The report provides information against the following elements of the fire safety programme of work
 - 2.3.1 Section 3 - Fire Safety Strategy
 - 2.3.2 Section 4 - Sprinkler Retrofit Programme
 - 2.3.3 Section 5 - Fire Door Replacement Programme
 - 2.3.4 Section 6 - External Panel Replacement Programme
 - 2.3.5 Section 7 - Resident Engagement
- 2.4 It also includes the blocks that will benefit from the programme and start dates, thus:



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2.4.1. Sprinkler retrofit installations

2021/2022

- Ladywood House
- Handsworth House

2022/2023

- Mill Gate House
- Sarah Robinson House
- The Underground Car Parks At Grafton Street, Estella Road, Westminster Place And Wingfield Street

2023/2024

- Nickleby House
- Barkis House
- Tipton House
- Edgbaston House

2024/2025

- Copperfield House
- Pickwick House

2.4.2. Fire door replacement

2021/2022

- Hale Court
- St John's Court
- Thorrowgood House

2022/2023

- Escur Close (1-47 Odds)
- The Ridings (109-155 Odds)
- Copperfield House
- Pickwick House
- Nickleby House
- Barkis House

2023/2024

- Mill Gate House
- Sarah Robinson House
- Ladywood House
- Handsworth House



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2024/25

- Tipton House
- Edgbaston House

2.4.3. Panel replacement schemes

2021/2022

Phase One

- Ladywood House
- Handsworth House
- Sarah Robinson House

Phase Two

- Westminster Street (1-78)
- Wingfield Place (1-71)

2022/2023

Phase Three

- Estella Road (1-189)
- Grafton Street (2-238)

Phase Four

- Hawthorn Crescent (475-522)

3 Fire Safety Strategy

- 3.1 HNB undertake Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) to all relevant properties under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and implement appropriate fire measures to the common parts of all blocks of flats to minimise the risk of injury or loss of life in the event of a fire.
- 3.2 The FRA is a Type 1 non-destructive survey to the common parts of blocks of flats using the PAS79:2012 template, which is not an intrusive survey. A review of an FRA will be undertaken whenever a significant change has occurred to a block of flats or asset but will not exceed 3 years from the original FRA. A more frequent review will be carried out if deemed appropriate by the surveyor undertaking the original FRA.
- 3.3 The FRAs for higher risk assets such as blocks of flats that are six storeys and above, sheltered blocks, houses in multiple occupation or offices, will be undertaken by appropriately experienced third party registered fire risk assessors. FRA for lower risk assets such as blocks of flats that are five storeys and below, are undertaken by in-house building surveyors who have completed appropriate training to demonstrate their competence.



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- 3.4 An overall assessment of the potential risk of fire is evaluated by the fire risk assessor with recommendations to address issues identified that are prioritised as appropriate depending on the risk. The recommendations are allocated to the appropriate HNB team and may include management actions or repairs.
- 3.5 The fire risk assessment recommendations may also include undertaking further more intrusive inspections of the block by specialists such as fire engineers or carrying out fire stopping surveys to check the actual construction details. It may also recommend carrying out destructive sampling of specific materials used on the building to assess their combustibility.
- 3.6 HNB manage 753 HRA blocks of flats that are five storeys and below that require an FRA together with an additional 41 HRA block of flats that are six storeys and above that require an FRA. There are currently no outstanding FRAs for any block of flats that are being managed.
- 3.7 HRA dwellings, including those of leaseholders, will be fitted with at least one mains operated smoke detector with a battery back-up on each dwelling floor level as appropriate which will be replaced in accordance with manufacturer's instructions by the expiry date. If on inspection the smoke detector is within one year of the manufacturer's expiry date it will be replaced. Smoke detectors are tested and expiry dates checked annually as part of the gas servicing contract.
- 3.8 HRA blocks of flats are regularly inspected throughout the year by the Estate Services teams and Repairs teams undertaking block inspections and raising any repairs as appropriate.
- 3.9 HNB hold regular quarterly strategic safety group meetings attended by the appropriate heads of service and team managers as appropriate specifically for fire safety and separately for high rise buildings to discuss and review policies and processes, evaluate any actions that have been identified or incidents and compliance reports, all to inform future planned fire safety improvement programmes.
- 3.10 Regular meetings are also held with representatives from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to share information, organise joint inspections of high rise blocks and facilitate training exercises and community engagement.
- 3.11 The fire safety improvement programme has been planned to address the highest priority blocks first, coordinate different contracts to avoid multiple works being undertaken at one time on any individual block of flats and minimise the disruption to residents.



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4 Sprinkler Retrofit Programme

- 4.1 The sprinkler retrofit programme was due to commence during 2020/21, however the impact of the risk of further lockdowns during the year due to the pandemic was assessed at the start of the first lockdown. As access would be required into every room in every property there was a potential impact that further lockdown restrictions would prevent access to properties and this would delay progress of works on site. The programme was therefore deferred until 2021/22.
- 4.2 The total investment planned from the HRA Capital Programme for the planned sprinkler retrofit programme over the next five years is £9.5M including the carry forward from the programme being deferred for one year. The list of blocks is highlighted in 2.4.1.
- 4.3 The Building Projects team has undertaken a feasibility study for the installation of sprinkler systems to all tower blocks in the Council HRA housing portfolio. An overall assessment of the suitability of the existing building construction and mechanical and electrical services was undertaken to establish if it would be feasible to retrofit residential sprinklers. Due to low water pressure in Portsmouth, plant areas were assessed to establish if there would be sufficient space available to install a dedicated water storage tanks and associated pump sets and valve arrangements.
- 4.4 In order to understand the practical challenges of installation, the surveys specifically considered the location of existing risers and suitability for installing vertical sprinkler distribution pipework and the location of existing stairwells to see if they would be suitable for vertical distribution pipework. Possible routes of horizontal and vertical pipework assuming new holes are formed within existing structure and consideration of structural implications to existing ceiling heights and bulkheads was carried out.
- 4.5 The prioritisation of works to the tower blocks where sprinklers may be reasonably accommodated has also been assessed. Whilst there is no formally established method for prioritisation we have considered and agreed with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service the following factors in creating a risk matrix:
1. Height of the building
 2. Number of escape stairs
 3. Proportion of supported living residents
 4. Presence of mains gas
 5. Location

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- 4.6 Height of Building: There are no requirements to retrofit sprinklers under the current legislation, however under the current building regulations, new residential blocks where the top floor slab is greater than 30 metres are required to have sprinklers. Ten blocks of flats have top floors that exceed 30m
- 4.7 Number of Escape Stairs: Residential blocks are permitted to have a single escape stair irrespective of height. However, it is clear that having more than one stair increases the chance of escape for residents if necessary. Six blocks of flats have single escape staircases.
- 4.8 Proportion of supported living residents: These are typically elderly residents or those who, owing to a reduced physical or cognitive capability, require additional support. Notwithstanding the current 'Stay Put' policy (agreed by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service) there may therefore be a requirement for assisted escape giving these people a higher vulnerability in the event of a serious fire.
- 4.9 Presence of Mains Gas: All the blocks of flats assessed are non-traditional construction and the presence of main gas in Large Panel System (LPS) buildings is not recommended due to the risk of explosion from gas leaks and potential collapse, no LPS buildings therefore has piped gas. Mains gas is present in only four blocks assessed.
- 4.10 Location: in order to procure the contract effectively and noting that there are typically paired blocks of similar construction located together, the location of the blocks is a factor within the priority matrix.
- 4.11 The primary objective of a residential or a domestic sprinkler system is Life Safety, aiming to control any fire that occurs within a protected premises to escape or be rescued. The operation of any sprinkler system will also provide a significant degree of property protection by minimising damage to the origin of the fire and or its contents. Residential Sprinkler heads should be in accordance with BS 9252 with quick response temperature sensing elements.
- 4.12 The residential sprinkler heads proposed would be concealed fast response fire sprinkler head. These are generally the diameter of a down light. The cover plates of these types of units are normally coloured white. In the event of a fire activating a concealed sprinkler head reaching its operating point, the flat plate will drop from the devise and the deflector plate of the sprinkler head will then drop below the ceiling level. As the temperature at ceiling level increase to 74 degrees Celsius, a bi-metal strip activates and releases the seal which enables the full flow of water to be directed towards the fire.
- 4.13 The pipework is concealed within bulkheads to flats and surface mounted pipework in refuse storage areas. Typically the works within each flat can take



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approximately two days per installation and residents can remain in the property while the works are carried out.

4.14 Sprinkler heads cannot 'false' alarm. The only way they can operate is when the air around them reaches the heads predetermined temperature. They will not respond to smoke, dust or fumes from aerosol sprays. Sprinkler heads can be damaged deliberately, but these tend to be extremely rare events and where this happens the perpetrator would get very wet.

4.15 Sprinkler protection should be provided in all parts/areas of the property. However unless required by a building fire strategy or building risk assessment, the following areas may be excluded:-

- Bathrooms with a floor area of less than 5m²
- Cupboards and pantries with a floor area of less than 2m² or where the least dimension does not exceed 1 m
- Attached buildings such as garages and or boiler houses without direct access from within the protected building
- External balconies permanently open to the outside
- Uninhabited loft and / or roof voids
- Protected escape routes within the communal areas.

The procurement has commenced to establish a framework of contractors who can undertake the design and installation of sprinkler systems. Four contractors have been selected from initial evaluation to tender for the first phase that includes the two blocks identified as the highest priority using the priority matrix. It is anticipated that the contract will be awarded in April and that the first phase is anticipated to be on site by autumn 2021.

5 Fire Door Replacement Programme

5.1 The fire door replacement programme was due to commence during 2020/21, however the impact of the risk of further lockdowns during the year due to the pandemic was assessed at the start of the first lockdown. As access would be required in every property there was a potential impact that further lockdown restrictions would prevent access to properties and this would delay progress of works on site. The opportunity was also undertaken to review the fire door specification options and take a more holistic view of the impact of the works on other schemes planned. The programme was therefore deferred until 2021/22.

5.2 The total investment planned from the HRA Capital Programme for the planned fire door replacement programme over the next five years is £10.0M including the carry forward from the programme being deferred for one year.

5.3 The planned fire door replacement programme is highlighted in 2.4.2



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- 5.4 HNB have worked with a local door manufacturer, Ahmarra Doors Ltd, to have its own specified timber door tested in December 2019. The timber door specified exceeded the 30 minutes minimum requirements by 40% and subsequently this door has been used on some planned schemes.
- 5.5 In November 2019 a new requirement was brought in that any composite external fire door had to be CE marked. This required the door suppliers to have further testing undertaken on the doors which limited the market and has taken time as testing centres closed due to COVID. We currently have identified two door suppliers, Unitydoor (Britdoor) and Solidcor, who can be specified. Each door can only be installed to a brick surround due to scope of the door installation tested.
- 5.6 Currently there are no manufacturers or suppliers who have a certified composite external door with sidelight that meets testing requirements and is CE marked. We are continuing our research with suppliers to try to overcome this and it will limit our options where fire doors are configured with a side light.
- 5.7 The strategy for the programme to replace fire doors is to focus on fire doors that have been tested and where no other works are planned at the sites. Due to the number of doors that it is planned to replace we are working with procurement to investigate options for establishing a preferred supplier framework.

6 External Panel Replacement Programme

- 6.1 The external panel replacement programme is detailed is highlighted in 2.4.3
- 6.2 The total investment planned from the HRA Capital Programme for the planned external panel replacement programme over the next three years is £2.5M.
- 6.3 The Fire Safety Bill is proposing to extend the scope of fire risk assessments to include the structure and external walls of the building including cladding, balconies and windows. This wasn't originally within the scope of fire risk assessments. The fire risk assessments that have been undertaken during 2020 by Ensure, the HNB external accredited fire risk assessors, has included an assessment of the external walls and recommended establishing the fire performance of some external panels to the external elevation of some blocks.
- 6.4 A project team was established and Vemco Consulting were appointed as fire engineers to undertake intrusive investigations and testing of the panels to determine the type and make of panels, the type and make of any insulation present, the type of supporting structure / presence of cavity barriers or fire breaks.



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- 6.5 The purpose of the reports was to identify any panels that it was recommended should be replaced to reduce the risk of fire. The fire engineer reports have identified eight blocks of flats where it is recommended that the panels are replaced as they are either glass reinforced plastic (GRP) coated panels, high pressure laminate (HPL) panels or PVC composite spandrel panels that are typically located under windows.
- 6.6 The FRA's have been reviewed by Ensure who undertook the original FRA's and updated with the fire engineer information regarding the panels. They have concluded in their report that the overall assessment of the blocks remained unchanged and the only recommendation was to increase the frequency of block inspections at three of the blocks of flats. This was instigated immediately and will remain until the panels are removed. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service have also been kept updated regularly regarding the panels, joint inspections of the blocks have been carried out and they are satisfied with how the blocks are being managed.
- 6.7 The London Housing Consortium (LHC) framework was chosen as their WH2 South Framework provided a number of value bands and a wide range of contractors. The use of a pre-existing external Framework reduces the procurement programme by removing the requirement for advertisement and shortlisting of contractors, enabling the work to be procured quicker.
- 6.8 Invitations to tender were issued on 12th October 2020 for the whole programme with tenders returned on 20th November 2020. The contract has been awarded and will be JCT Intermediate Building Contract with Contractor's Design 2016 (ICD). The works are planned to commence on site April 2021. The programme is phased with sectional completion dates for each site.

7. Resident Engagement

- 7.1 The resident communication strategy is to utilise the fire safety improvement programme as an opportunity to re-engage with residents to promote fire safety generally and key messages regarding fire safety, particularly within high rise blocks of flats. This will include working closely with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and undertaking joint community engagement events, similar to those held a couple of years ago, where the focus is not only the residents of the blocks directly having works undertaken, but the wider resident community.
- 7.2 When the schemes are being prepared residents will be engaged and kept updated regarding the specific planned project to their block by the Building Project team leading the scheme. This will include not only standard letters but undertaking open day events utilising 'pilot flats' that demonstrate the proposed

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work and provide an opportunity to discuss the schemes individually with residents.

- 7.3 With regard to the retrofit sprinkler programme specifically, we will engage Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service mobile unit to provide a practical demonstration of how effective sprinklers operate and this will be replicated at the start of the programme.
- 7.4 As reported at the Housing and Preventing Homelessness Cabinet on 7 December 2020 as part of the Building safety Regulatory Reform report, discussions are ongoing with the Housing Resident Consortium to expand the current senior management forum to have resident representatives as part of the quarterly building compliance meeting and to rename the group the 'Building and Customer Safety Panel'.

8 Director of Finance Comments

- 8.1 The cost of the measures in the report will be around £22m and will be funded through the Housing Revenue Account Major Repairs reserve as set out in the Council Housing maintenance and improvements and Housing IT Business software 2021/22 report budget book, 7-year plan, to be agreed at this meeting.
- 8.2 If at a later date the Council becomes aware of any external funding that is available to meet these costs it will work to secure this funding to reduce the burden on the reserve.

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Signed by James Hill - Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

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
Housing and Preventing Homelessness Cabinet on 7 December 2020 - Building safety Regulatory Reform report	Building Safety Regulatory Reform.pdf (portsmouth.gov.uk)